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**The Memory of the Lost Cause and White Southern
Nationalism: Case Study of the League of the South**

Master's thesis

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Year of the defense: 2022

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on

January 4, 2022

Hana Radová

References

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Abstract

Following the end of the Civil War, the revisionist myth of the Lost Cause spread over the South as an apologist narrative for white hegemony and slavery, which protected the former Confederate states from the devastating effects of their loss. Pro-Confederate organizations lobbied to replace real history with this collective memory of the South through education and memorialization. This national myth then served as a legitimization of white Southern nationalism that sought to restore white hegemony of the antebellum racial order. The white nationalist organization League of the South, whose goal is the second secession of the Southern states, embraces and manifests the ideology of the Lost Cause in its textual and audiovisual discourse and use of iconography. This discourse anchors their separatist intentions in the context of postwar collective memory, and aids the organization in the legitimization of their actions on the basis of revisionist history. The League derives its identity from this collective memory as the self-established white Southern ethnicity of Anglo-Celtic origin and the descendants of Founding Fathers as well as Confederate leaders. In doing so, the League identifies itself as the organization of true heirs of America stigmatized by the external aggression of the federal government and its anti-Southern politics, and presents its white supremacist rhetoric within the framework of socially acceptable discourse which uses the rhetoric of white victimization and the portrayal of violence and secession as a critical part of white Southern survival.

Abstrakt

Na konci Občanské války se po Jihu rozšířil revizionistický mýtus Lost Cause (“Ztracená věc”), který jako narativa omlouvající bílou nadřazenost a otrokářství chránil státy dřívější Konfederace před zničujícími dopady jejich prohry. Organizace nakloněné bývalé Konfederaci lobbovaly za účelem nahrazení skutečné historie kolektivní paměti Jihu skrze vzdělání a memorializaci. Tento nový národní mýtus posléze sloužil jako legitimizace bílého jižanského nacionalismu, který se snažil na Jihu opět nastolit bílou hegemonii předválečného rasového rádu. Bílá nacionalistická Liga Jihu, jejímž cílem je opětovné vystoupení států Jihu z USA, přijímá a manifestuje ideologii Lost Cause ve svém textuálním a audiovizuálním

diskurzu a užití ikonografie. Tento diskurz ukotvuje jejich separatistické záměry v kontextu poválečné kolektivní paměti, a napomáhá organizaci k legitimizaci jejich činnosti na základě revidované historie. Liga odvozuje svou identitu od této kolektivní paměti jako samozvané bílé jižanské etnikum anglo-keltského původu, potomci Otců zakladatelů a vůdců Konfederace. Vypodobňuje se tak jako skupina pravých dědiců Ameriky, které diskriminuje externí agrese federální vlády a její anti-jižanské politiky, a prezentuje svou retoriku nadřazenosti bílé rasy v rámci sociálně přijatelného diskurzu, který využívá retoriky bílé viktimizace a zobrazení násilí a odtržení jako zásadní prvek přežití jižanského etnika.

Keywords

White nationalism, Lost Cause, League of the South, US South, collective memory

Klíčová slova

Bílý nacionalismus, Lost Cause, Liga Jihu, Jih USA, kolektivní paměť

Title

The Memory of the Lost Cause and Southern White Nationalism: Case Study of the League of the South

Název práce

Paměť narativu 'Lost Cause' a bílý nacionalismus na americkém Jihu, případová studie: Liga Jihu

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Introduction

On August 11, 2017, a white supremacist “Unite the Right” rally marched through the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, chanting “White lives matter” and “You will not replace us” as they waved Confederate battle flags, lit torches, and brandished swastikas. The rally was provoked by the city council's intention to remove the local General Robert E. Lee statue.¹ Jason Kessler, a white supremacist and the organizer of the event, declared the “Unite the Right” rally was an effort to “stand[ing] up for our history”² and against censorship. The rally soon turned violent when protesters clashed with counter-protesters, and resulted in one death and 19 injuries when a Nazi-sympathizer rammed a car into the crowd.

In a demonstration of white anxiety and hate projected towards the perceived historical revisionism and federal suppression of the white Southern Civil War heritage, the rally showed that not only is the American conversation on race far from over, but also that another debate, regarding the interpretation and the reinterpretation of Southern history, emerges as a central point of the Southern belief system – especially regarding white Southern nationalists. Considering the deepening polarization of the American socio-political scene,³ these debates therefore are vital not only regarding the issue of Southern white identity and harmonious co-existence of various minorities in the area, but also regarding the future of American political discourse.

¹ The monument was eventually removed, along with another Confederate general, Stonewall Jackson, in July 2021.

² Jason Hanna, Kaylee Hartung, Devon M. Sayers and Steve Almasy, “Virginia Governor to White Nationalists: ‘Go Home... Shame On You.’” CNN, August 13, 2017
<<https://us.cnn.com/2017/08/12/us/charlottesville-white-nationalists-rally/index.html>> January 28, 2021.

³ Michael Dimock, Richard Wike, “America Is Exceptional In the Nature of Its Political Divide,” Pew Research Center, November 12, 2020
<<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/13/america-is-exceptional-in-the-nature-of-its-political-divide/>> January 28, 2021.

The aim of the thesis

According to historian C. Vann Woodward, Southern identity is founded not only in its geography, economy, or climate, but mainly in its fundamental historical heritage, the “collective experience of the Southern people [...] their unique historic experience as Americans.”⁴ This heritage has since the Civil War been continuously un-American; if the American legend is the story of success, abundance, and invincibility, the South has known defeat, poverty, and humiliation.⁵ The dualism of fortune and tragedy, as well as nationalism and regionalism, remains deeply embedded in the Southern identity. As said by historian Shelby Foote, the Civil War is crucial to the American character because it “defined us as what we are and it opened us to being what we became — good and bad things.”⁶ The understanding of the rise of white nationalism in the post-Civil War South is therefore determined by the understanding of the Southern post-war trauma, summed up by the ideology of the Lost Cause, a post-Civil War narrative designed to justify the rise of the Confederacy and rationalize its loss through victimization and the employment of a romanticized collective memory of the antebellum South.

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the relationship between the Lost Cause and white Southern nationalism as it is reflected in the collective memory of the League of the South, a white Southern nationalist organization dedicated to Southern separatism. I examine the formulation of the Lost Cause in literature and memorialization, the extent to which white Southern nationalists embrace the ideology of the Lost Cause in the present day, and the mutual influence of the contemporary socio-political situation in the American South on local

⁴ C. Vann Woodward, “The Search for Southern Identity,” *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Summer 1958): 331. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26442612>> January 28, 2021.

⁵ Woodward, 333.

⁶ Ken Burns, “The Civil War,” *Youtube*, uploaded by Semih Söylemez4, March 20, 2017 <<https://youtu.be/KlseQlnk3R8?t=514>> January 28, 2021.

white nationalism. I have selected the League of the South as a case study in the context of the Lost Cause as a representative of white Southern nationalism. In this thesis I argue that white nationalism in the American South has close connections with the post-Civil War narrative of the Lost Cause, namely that white supremacist ideology embraced by the Lost Cause has shaped the socio-historical memory of the South and its emphasis on racial tensions, and that this narrative has fueled the Southern theater of white nationalism in the United States. In order to do so, I explore how the League of the South articulates in the present day a version of the Lost Cause ideology as an artifact of Southern nationalism.

League of the South: Context

The League of the South is Southern nationalist organization dedicated to the “survival, well-being, and independence of the Southern people,”⁷ headquartered in Killen, Alabama and designated as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.⁸ The organization advocates for the second secession of the Southern states and the formation of a “free independent Southern republic”⁹ dominated by the supreme culture of white Southern Christians.¹⁰ I selected the League as the focus of study for its extensive acceptance of the ideology of the Lost Cause,¹¹ its ultimate goal of a new Confederacy, i. e. the secession of the Southern states, and its high profile and strong online as well as public presence (the Anti-Defamation League considers it to be “quickly becoming one of the country's most

⁷ “Welcome to the League of the South,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com>> April 8, 2021.

⁸ “League of the South,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*.

<<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/league-south>> April 8, 2021.

⁹ “Welcome to the League of the South.”

¹⁰ “Our Survival as People,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/our-survival-as-a-people/>> April 8, 2021.

¹¹ The extent will be analyzed further in the thesis.

active white supremacist groups”¹² and the members consider themselves “the largest, most organized, and foremost advocate for the Southron [sic] people.”)¹³

Based on preliminary findings from the articles and position papers on the League's website, the organization expresses strong attachment to a Christian, conservative Southern culture as the legacy of the original Confederacy, and expresses opinions which accept the ideology of the Lost Cause, in particular the South's right to secession, the supremacy of (white) Southern culture, and the notion of the federal aggression towards the Southern states. The language used on the website frequently evokes victimization of the South by a “failed leftist multicultural experiment”¹⁴ of the government, therefore positioning the League of the South as a reactionary organization of resistance to external aggression which attacks the collective psychological, cultural, and political identity of the South (“we” vs “the enemy”).

Methodology and sources

This thesis aims to provide a critical discourse analysis of textual and audio-visual material provided by the official website of the League of the South in order to examine the connection between the Lost Cause and white Southern nationalism, supported by secondary literature on the historical context of the Lost Cause, collective memory, and white nationalism. Primary sources are the textual material provided by the League of the South, which consists of written texts and audiovisual material published on the organization's official website. This includes articles, position papers, and visual media consisting of photos and video footage published on the official League of the South's website, where the organization articulates its ideas and values, and records of its street activism including

¹² “League of the South,” *Anti-Defamation League*.

<<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/league-of-the-south-los>> September 7, 2021.

¹³ “Welcome to The League of the South.”

¹⁴ “Why Southern Nationalism?” *League of the South*.

<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/why-southern-nationalism/>> September 8, 2021.

rallies, billboards, and public speeches (this may occasionally overlap with records on its website). Secondary sources include contemporary studies of the Lost Cause conducted predominantly by Civil War historians, as well as academic literature on collective memory and white extremism, including the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit organization monitoring hate groups in the United States.

Thesis layout

The aim of this diploma thesis is to examine the connection between history and collective identity, namely the origins and the impact of white nationalism in the American South. The source of this relationship is to be found predominantly in the conflict of collective memory; in the words of race relations author Clive Webb, “In no other region do disputes over the meaning of the past so profoundly influence contemporary public debate.”¹⁵ While the problems of the present Southern identity originate in its earliest settlements and are indisputable tied with the issues of race and slavery, the primary focus of this thesis is the aftermath of the Civil War and the pathos of the “Lost Cause” as the national myth of the South and a major source of white nationalism. On the basis of this historical context, the collective memory and identity of Southern white nationalists are examined through the case study of the League of the South.

The first chapter of the thesis presents the Lost Cause as the foundation of white Southern nationalist identity on the basis of collective memory. It explores the origins of the myth, the rhetoric of the Lost Cause in post-Civil War Southern society, its manifestations through education and public commemorations by Confederate groups, and its effect on white nationalism in the South. Finally, the chapter works with the fact that the Civil War did

¹⁵ Clive Webb, “The South Today,” *The American South: A Reader and Guide*, ed. Daniel Letwin (Edinburg University Press: 2013): 382.

not serve as a catharsis of the racial tensions, and instead the Lost Cause arose as the source of white Southern identity within the racial framework of the South; this we encounter in the contemporary debate on Confederate symbols.

The second chapter discusses the identity of white Southern nationalists as exhibited by the white nationalist organization called the League of the South, as well as its manifestations in the sociopolitical context of the contemporary period; these include but are not limited to identification with conservative Christianity, patriotism to one's own state and the South, intolerance towards minorities as well as anxiety over the demographic changes in the United States, and embrace of the symbols of the Confederation. Although the League's contemporary debate of white Southern nationalism is strongly anchored in the present and to its reaction to socioethnic changes in the United States, it simultaneously reflects the historical roots of the Lost Cause following the Civil War. Predominantly, this chapter examines the extent to which the League embodies the narrative of the Lost Cause in their rhetoric.

The third chapter focuses on promotion of the narrative of the Lost Cause by the League of the South through iconography, namely its presence in online media and defense of cultural symbols such as flags and monuments. The chapter examines the flag politics of the League of the South within the framework of collective memory of Southern white nationalists. The League's use of flags at public demonstrations, on their website, and on their merchandise demonstrates their identification with their Southern heritage as well as their willingness to defend it as an organization. In order to contextualize the argument, the chapter provides a debate on the flag politics of the Confederacy and the subsequent use of the Confederate battle flag by various interest groups.

Definition of terms

In order to establish clear boundaries regarding the focus and limits of this analysis, several terms must be clearly defined. Among these are collective memory, identity, white nationalism and the extreme right, the American South, and the Lost Cause. The first term to be defined is collective memory.

As Jeffrey K. Olick writes, memory is “the very lifeblood” of group existence.¹⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist who is widely considered the father of the term “collective memory,” defined the term as a memory (which differs from history as a subjective recollection of the past) carried by individuals within a social framework. Distinction between individual and collective memory is often problematic to define, because individuals remember within the context of a group. Apart from social framework, collective memory appears through specific manifestations of the cultural heritage of a group, like commemoration through monuments or flags. Such collective context is selective and transformative as actors engage with the past material through either endorsement of the status quo or its reconstruction,¹⁷ and can give an individual memories he has not himself experienced. Collective memory, as a form of active past, forms one's identity.¹⁸ This is important regarding the Southern collective memory of the Lost Cause many generations after the Civil War, as well as in the states which have not been a part of the Confederacy, and the formulation of their identity. That is therefore the next term to be defined.

This thesis adapts the definition of identity as understood by the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, i.e. a sense of self of either an individual or a group which

¹⁶ Jeffrey K. Olick, *Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (Routledge: 2007): 6.

¹⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980): 48; Olick, 8.

¹⁸ Olick, 19-20.

“differentiates me from you and us from them.”¹⁹ Individual identity is constructed and shaped within groups through mutual interaction. Unlike individuals, who have multiple identities where one becomes salient according to a given social situation, groups are usually defined by one primary characteristic. Perception of self and others plays a vital role in self-identification; people can define themselves against certain characteristics, or align themselves with them. Huntington also works with the term identity politics, which he describes as “discourses and social activism focused on racial, religious, sexual, ethnic, gender, or national identity.”²⁰ In the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the idea of identity politics is founded in the shared experience of injustice due to membership in an oppressed social group;²¹ political theorist Wendy Brown claims that this emphasis on disadvantage “operates largely through accusation and the demand for redress,”²² i.e. an inclusion of power. In the case of the League of the South, such power is achieved through Southern secession as well as political and cultural dominance of the “correct” ethnic group over the area.

An important theory regarding identity politics of white Southern nationalists, as fronted by the League of the South, is primordialism; its proponents argue that the one ethnic identity of a person is biologically determined, fixed, exogenous to human processes, and “deeply rooted” in the past.²³ The identity of white Southern nationalists may therefore be recognized through race or ethnicity in combination with historical achievements and trauma, such as the Southern defeat in the Civil War and the subsequent narrative of the Lost Cause.

¹⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 2004): 21.

²⁰ Huntington, 78.

²¹ “Identity Politics,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. July 11, 2020 <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/#Aca>> January 30, 2021.

²² In the words of Olick, 162; Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995): 55-61.

²³ Kanchan Chandra, *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics* (Oxford University Press: 2012): 132.

Therefore, an ethnic identity cannot be modified through demographic changes in a nation; it is either dominant or inferior. A vital concern of white Southern nationalists of the League of the South is the dominance of (white) Southerners over their region.

The next term to be defined is white nationalism. According to politics expert Eric Kaufmann, white nationalism is a set of ideological beliefs whose national identity is built around white ethnicity.²⁴ Their primary ethnocultural concern is the promotion, honoring, and preservation of the white race, predominantly in the Western hemisphere.²⁵ According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, white nationalists seek to maintain white hegemony in the increasingly multicultural U.S. population and culture, and combat the so-called “white genocide”, i.e. the idea “that whites in the United States are being systematically replaced and destroyed”²⁶ through demographical diversity, both legal and illegal immigration, as well as the changing U.S. political scene and legislature. Although white nationalism, white supremacy, and white segregationism are often used interchangeably, an important distinction exists between the three terms.

White supremacists not only believe in the necessity to develop a white national identity which dominates the nation's political and economic scene; they also believe in that identity's innate and historical superiority over other races.²⁷ Furthermore, white separatists support the thought of racial segregation, with separate territories, governments, and lives on the basis of one's race. Although white supremacism and white separatism are extremist subtypes of the movement, not all white nationalists are supremacists, separatists, or even extremists; according to a 2006 Federal Bureau of Investigation intelligence assessment,

²⁴ Amanda Taub, “‘White Nationalism,’ Explained,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/22/world/americas/white-nationalism-explained.html?_r=0>

²⁵ United States, FBI, Counterterrorism Division, *Intelligence Assessment: State of the Domestic White Nationalist Extremistic Movement in the United States* (December 13, 2006): 4.

²⁶ “White Nationalist,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*. <<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/white-nationalist>> January 25, 2021.

²⁷ Taub.

more than 100 000 domestic white nationalists hold extremist views, but fewer than 500 are willing to use violence.²⁸ Neither the Department of Justice nor the FBI formally recognize these movements as domestic terrorist organizations, but as “threats” to be monitored.²⁹ However, as recorded by a Joint Intelligence Bulletin by the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security, white supremacism extremists were responsible for more attacks and casualties between 2000 and 2016 than any other extremist movement.³⁰

White nationalism is also closely interconnected with the extreme right. Difficulties exist regarding a consistent definition of the term; social anthropologist Tore Bjørgo considers the term problematic for its imprecision and often political implications where none exist.³¹ He further emphasizes that while extreme right promotes certain values and issues, these may exist in some groups of extremists and be completely irrelevant to others. Nevertheless, he notes that in the United States, a central belief of the extreme right is hostility towards the federal government controlled by “hostile and alien forces” seeking to deprive its citizens of Constitutional rights.³²

In contrast, international relations scholar Michael Cox and right-wing politics expert Martin Durham insist that it is race that is central to the extreme right in the U.S., which is synonymous with white supremacy.³³ A manifestation of the white nationalist tendencies which has come into prominence in the last years is the Alternative Right or “alt-right” movement, which combines far right anti-establishment ideologies with white ethnonationalism and heavy presence on social media, where they oppose the “political

²⁸ FBI, 3.

²⁹ Jerome P. Bjelopera, “Domestic Terrorism: An Overview,” *Congressional Research Service* (2017): 10.

³⁰ United States, FBI, Department of Homeland Security, *Joint Intelligence Bulletin: White Supremacist Extremism Poses Persistent Threat of Lethal Violence* (May 10, 2017): 4.

³¹ *Terror from the Extreme Right*, ed. Tore Bjørgo (Frank Cass: London, 1995): 2.

³² *Terror from the Extreme Right*, Editor's Preface.

³³ Michael Cox, Martin Durham, *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, ” ed. Paul Hainsworth (Pinter: London and New York, 2000): 288.

correctness” and multiculturalism as tools of white dispossession.³⁴ Furthermore, historian Kathleen Belew uses the umbrella term “white power movement” for overlapping white nationalist ideologies ranging from the KKK to skinheads, in order to emphasize that white nationalism does not refer to extreme patriotism towards the United States, but to racial unity of white people which takes precedence over the United States.³⁵

As various sources use their own definitions of white power movements, when citing, I will use their original terminology, although my primary focus remains white nationalism centered on the Southern region of the United States. Therefore, regarding the League of the South, I will use the term white Southern nationalism. It is how the organization self-identifies, moreover white supremacy indicates the desire to dominate, white separatism the desire to segregate by race, and white nationalism the identification not only with race, but also nation.

White Southern nationalism is therefore a form of geographically and ethno-culturally specific white nationalism, centered around the idea of white racial identity in the Southern region of the United States. The cornerstone of white Southern identity is not only one's white race, but also pride in the historical and cultural heritage of the South. Racial relations form a fundamental portion of white Southern nationalism. The end of the Civil War, cemented by the 13th Amendment and the subsequent emancipation of all slaves, should have served as the catharsis of racial relations. Instead, it uncovered layers of deeply ingrained feelings of white supremacy; racial tension and poverty evolved into major components of Southern reality after the Civil War.

³⁴ “Alt-Right,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*.

<<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/alt-right>> January 28, 2021.

³⁵ Kathleen Belew, “Rise of White Power Movement with Kathleen Belew (Ep. 16),” *Big Brains*, University of Chicago News. <<https://news.uchicago.edu/podcasts/big-brains/rise-white-power-movement-kathleen-belew>> September 30, 2021.

Moreover, the South's traumatizing loss included roughly 258,000 dead Confederates,³⁶ a devastated slavery-reliant economy which lost its primary basis, and the period of Reconstruction. The necessity to protect the wounded national consciousness created the national myth of the Lost Cause, a sentimental reinterpretation of the causes and consequences of the Civil War which by the 1890s dominated the Southern historical narrative. According to the exceptionalist ideology of the Lost Cause, the Confederacy fought a heroic battle to defend the states' rights and the traditional values of the agricultural region against the cold, tyrannical, industrialized North. As historian David W. Blight writes,

“For most white Southerners, the Lost Cause evolved into a language of vindication and renewal, as well as an array of practices and public monuments through which they could solidify both their Southern pride and their Americanness.”³⁷

Although historian Lorri Glover asserts that racial slavery was “pivotal”³⁸ in creating and holding the antebellum South, the Lost Cause narrative amplifies the “grievance and gallantry”³⁹ of the Confederates, idealizes the affluent plantation life, and downplays the horrors of slavery. The nostalgic narrative not only served to bolster the damaged Southern identity, but also to resist the effort of the African Americans to rise to an equal status through Black Codes and Jim Crow. To this day, neo-Confederates insist that the secession of the South was prompted primarily by the despotic federal government, not the issue of slavery.⁴⁰

³⁶ Brogan, 355.

³⁷ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Harvard University Press, 2009): 266.

³⁸ Lorri Glover, “Origins of the Old South: The Colonial Era,” *The American South: A Reader and Guide*, ed. Daniel Letwin, (Edinburg University Press, 2013): 25.

³⁹ Paul Duggan, “Sins of the Fathers,” *The Washington Post*, November 28, 2018
<<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/magazine/wp/2018/11/28/feature/the-confederacy-was-built-on-slavery-how-can-so-many-southern-whites-still-believe-otherwise/>> January 28, 2021.

⁴⁰ Duggan.

The last term to be defined is the American South. The American South, located between the Atlantic Ocean and the American MidWest, south of the historical Mason-Dixon line, is defined by a distinct geographical, historical, and cultural character; the borders of the South vary on this basis, while simultaneously various interest groups use the term as per their own definition. According to the United States Census Bureau, the American South incorporates the West South Central area (Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana), the East South Central area (Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky), and the South Atlantic area (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, District of Columbia).⁴¹ Among other characteristics, these states share a unique set of dialects, cuisine, and music; its warm climate and fertile soil has influenced the primary role of agriculture in Southern history, which in turn gave rise to the institution of slavery, and subsequently the Confederate States of America. Due to a close connection between the South and the Confederacy, the two terms are often used interchangeably. However, the Confederacy designates a historical nation that only existed for four years, while the South is still present in the socio-geographical sphere of the United States. Furthermore, some of the Southern slave states did not secede from the Union and did not join the Confederacy – Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri.

As the primary focus of this thesis includes the analysis of the Lost Cause as a national myth of the South, only those states that had joined the Confederacy should be relevant to the examination: Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. This excludes the aforementioned border states which remained in the Union; however, the Southern Poverty

⁴¹ United States, U.S. Census Bureau, Geography Division, *Census Regions and Divisions of the United States*. Archived. <https://web.archive.org/web/20011104032413/http://www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf> January 21, 2021

Law Center recognizes white nationalist as well as Ku Klux Klan groups in Maryland,⁴² Kentucky,⁴³ and Missouri.⁴⁴ This thesis proposes, on the basis of Halbwachs' theory of collective memory and Huntington's ideas on identity, that even Southern states which did not partake in the Confederacy may include white nationalists who identify with the national myth of the Lost Cause. Furthermore, the South as advocated by the League of the South also includes Oklahoma, Missouri, Kentucky, and Maryland.⁴⁵ For the sake of unity with the examined group, this thesis will therefore define the South as the League of the South does.

The next chapter will explore the roots of the Lost Cause and its effects on white Southern nationalism in the aftermath of the Civil War.

⁴² "Maryland," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, 2019 <<https://www.splcenter.org/states/maryland>> January 30, 2021.

⁴³ "Kentucky," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, 2019 <<https://www.splcenter.org/states/kentucky>> January 30, 2021.

⁴⁴ "Missouri," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, 2019 <<https://www.splcenter.org/states/missouri>> January 30, 2021.

⁴⁵ "The Right to Secession and the Benefits of Independence for the South," *The League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/article-11-the-right-of-secession-and-the-benefits-of-independence-for-the-south/>> September 7, 2021.

1. The Lost Cause and the Historical Background of White Southern Nationalism

William Faulkner once quipped: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”⁴⁶ Always in a spirited dialogue with its legacy, Southern identity has been thoroughly shaped by its historical experience with slavery, white supremacy, many forms of nationalism, defeat, and the subsequent nostalgia for the antebellum era. This chapter examines the intersectionality of white supremacy and the essential features of the myth of the Lost Cause, and its mutual reinforcement in the creation of white Southern nationalism. The subsequent two chapters will explore how these qualities of the post-Civil War Lost Cause ideology play out in the white nationalist discourse of the League of the South.

The Confederate States of America have been formed to protect the so-called “peculiar institution” of slavery and white supremacy, and lost; one fifth of white Southern men of draft age died for the defeated side,⁴⁷ and as historian James M. McPherson writes, “The South was not only invaded and conquered, it was utterly destroyed.”⁴⁸ From the necessity to justify the costs and losses of the war, as well as to protect Southern pride in the Confederacy and the traditional Southern hierarchy, the defensive ideology of the Lost Cause was formulated.⁴⁹ As stated by historiographer Alan T. Nolan, “in the popular mind, the Lost Cause represents the national memory of the Civil War; it has been substituted for the *history* of the war.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1919): 85.

⁴⁷ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2008): xii.

⁴⁸ James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982): 476.

⁴⁹ Edward H. Bonekemper III, *The Myth of the Lost Cause: Why the South Fought the Civil War and Why the North Won* (Regnery History: Washington DC, 2015): 3.

⁵⁰ Alan T. Nolan, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (Indiana University Press, 2000): 12.

This distorted collective memory of the South defined how the eradicated Confederacy was remembered; additionally, it created a sufficient white nationalist narrative to rationalize legal measures for further white supremacy in the South. Furthermore, not only does it continue to influence the modern debate on racial conflict to this day, it also provides fuel to white nationalist rhetorics in the South.⁵¹ According to historian Gaines M. Foster, the importance of the Lost Cause rests in its cultural significance; it served the purpose of easing the sectional reconciliation of the postwar South with the new social order established by the victorious North; afterwards, its cultural relevance waned in the face of the successful development of the New South.⁵² However, the narrative continues to shape the public memory of the Civil War even today; facts are replaced with fiction or interpreted in the context of the collective pro-Confederate memory, its focus turned from preserving the institution of slavery towards defending state rights. As historian David W. Blight noted in 2010:

„The Lost Cause tradition—as both a version of history and as a racial ideology—is still certainly very much alive in neo-Confederate organizations, on numerous Web sites, among white supremacist groups, in staunch advocates of the Confederate battle flag, and even among some mainstream American politicians.“⁵³

A presentist approach to memory would describe the Lost Cause as a memory produced for “in the present for present purposes,”⁵⁴ which emerged in the former Confederate states as a coping mechanism to the unprecedented political changes and a new

⁵¹ As declared by Michael Hill, leader of the the white supremacist League of the South, “Our duty of the hour is to revive that fighting spirit of independence and honor that moved our noble ancestors and to renew the age-old struggle of our people—our blood defending our native soil of Dixie.” (Michael Hill, “In Defense of Our Blood,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/in-defense-of-our-blood/>> August 31, 2021.)

⁵² Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1983): 6-8.

⁵³ David W. Blight, *America on the Eve of the Civil War*, ed. by Edward L. Ayers and Carolyn R. Martin (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010): 123.

⁵⁴ Olick, 8.

social order with the emancipation of African Americans; its white nationalism formed in direct opposition to the attempts at ethnic equality of liberated slaves and the geopolitical influence of the Union's authority. In order to protect the legacy of the antebellum way of life – including white supremacy, racially-based social hierarchy, and Southern distinctiveness – the myth argued that slavery was “a positive good” and instead of white supremacy and slavery, the war was fought over the glorious, honorable issue of states' rights and Southern liberty, to which slavery was only a catalyst. Although states' rights and the issues of nationalism and liberty eventually became important topics in the sectional clash, historian Hugh Brogan points out that the problematic of the states' rights only evolved from the need to protect slavery.⁵⁵ Other tenets of the Lost Cause ideology include ardent veneration for Confederate symbols from the battle flag and memorials to General Robert E. Lee and other leaders of the Confederacy, and the assertion that the Confederacy was doomed from the beginning, fighting romantically and heroically against the unjust and dominant North in a war they could never win.

Though this national myth has been increasingly challenged via movements for racial equality and historical reexamination, the Lost Cause remains in the background of contemporary popular interpretations of history, as historian Grace Elizabeth Hale writes, “a decidedly partisan and self-consciously politicized account of the Civil War,”⁵⁶ a pervasive element of Southern legacy, and a vital part of sectional white nationalism. Sprouting from a nationalist post-war legend, it eventually infiltrated the Southern education system, and even found its way into academic circles.⁵⁷ It is a complex of emotionally-charged interpretations

⁵⁵ Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of the United States of America* (Penguin Books: London, 1985): 326.

⁵⁶ Grace Elizabeth Hale, “The Lost Cause and the Meaning of History,” *OAH Magazine of History* (January 2013): 14. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23489628>> September 7, 2021.

⁵⁷ Michael Hill, leader of the League of the South, holds a doctorate from the University of Alabama, and is a tenured professor of history at historically black Stillman College, although he no longer teaches there.

of history through public memory, produced by and in turn producing collective memory of the era:⁵⁸ to its proponents, the Lost Cause represents a justification, while opponents perceive it as a portrayal of the victimhood of white supremacy.

1.1 The Civil War: Reasons for Secession

The social order of the antebellum South rested on the pillars of class stratification and racial hierarchy which forced African Americans into slavery, and white supremacy along with protection of slavery were the key issues of Southern withdrawal from the Union.

⁵⁹ The domestic institution of black subjugation was in fact so important to the Southern slaveholding states that they were willing to construct a new autonomous pro-slavery nation based on the principle of racial inequality. The Confederacy was a direct consequence of slavery and growing sectionalism between the free Northern and pro-slave Southern states. In their respective declarations of secession, the individual states have stated their support for slavery as well as white supremacy; infuriated by Northern obstructions to the Fugitive Slave Law, the prohibitory legislation regarding slavery in new Western territories, and the threat of the abolitionist cause to the preservation of the “beneficent and patriarchal system,”⁶⁰ the states listed their grievances against the North, which were primarily centered around federal protection of slaveholder interests.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Foster, 6.

⁵⁹ Anne Sarah Rubin, “The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy,” *The American South: A Reader and Guide*, ed. Daniel Letwin (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2013): 171; Brogan, 318; Bonekemper, 92.

⁶⁰ “A Declaration of the Causes which Impel the State of Texas to Secede from the Federal Union,” *American Battlefield Trust*.

<<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/declaration-causes-seceding-states#Texas>>

⁶¹ “Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union,” *American Battlefield Trust*.

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/declaration-causes-seceding-states#South_Carolina>

January 30, 2021; “A Declaration of the Immediate Causes which Induce and Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union,” *American Battlefield Trust*.

<<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/declaration-causes-seceding-states#Mississippi>> January 30, 2021.

As Civil War historian Edward H. Bonekemper writes, “Whatever part states’ rights allegedly played in secession, concern for those rights corresponded to a state’s interest in maintaining or protecting the institution of slavery.”⁶² The Union’s response was afterwards equated with the North’s totalitarian tendencies imposing upon the Southern state rights and Southern freedom; this emphasis on freedom under the oppression of the federal government, evidently extended only to the white population in the South, afterwards continued to play a significant role in the white Southern nationalist discourse.

Much like its Union predecessor, the Confederacy was constructed with a declaration of independence from another government, the confederation of states, and a Constitution securing the most important ideas of the movement. Much of the values, principles, and mechanisms of the United States seeped into the Confederacy during its creation. The Founding Fathers, to whom the fathers of the Confederacy turned for inspiration, also debated slavery as the necessary status quo. However, while many Founding Fathers owned slaves, they also adhered to the philosophy of Enlightenment which upheld the equality of all men. George Washington’s last will dictated the emancipation of his slaves; Thomas Jefferson lamented his belief: “We have the wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation is in the other.”⁶³ Although the Fathers feared the consequences and often participated in the system of slavery, they hoped for gradual abolition in the future.⁶⁴

In the decades between the American Revolution and the Civil War, the Southern opinion of slavery underwent radical transformation from that of the Founders; the narrative

⁶² Bonekemper, 38.

⁶³ Thomas Jefferson, “From Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, 22 April 1820,” *Founders Online*, National Archives.

<<https://founders.archives.gov/?q=%22from%20thomas%20jefferson%20to%20john%20holmes%22&s=1111311111&sa=&r=13&sr=>> March 24, 2021.

⁶⁴ Brogan, 296-297.

shifted from Thomas Jefferson's "great evil"⁶⁵ into John C. Calhoun's "positive good."⁶⁶ In 1861, the Vice President of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens, declared the Confederacy's cornerstone rests "upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition."⁶⁷ The Confederate constitution was remodeled from the original to reflect this "great truth." The legislative measures, however later proclaimed as securing states' rights, placed slavery at the top; the Constitution was protected by a Supremacy Clause which declared the Constitution above all state legislature, providing federal protection of slavery above individual states' rights.⁶⁸

During the process of creating the new Southern nation, the seceded states believed that they continued the legacy of the Founding Fathers, thus embedding the original ideas of freedom, independence, and patriotism in their new collective identity. The Confederate states therefore relied on the antecedent language and imagery of the American Revolution for what historian Anne Sarah Rubin calls "a ready-made myth of national origin."⁶⁹ In its declaration of secession, South Carolina referenced the self-go Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation as "the two great principles asserted by the Colonies."⁷⁰ Similarly, Georgia referred to the dissent of "the venerable Madison" and "Mr. Jefferson,"⁷¹

⁶⁵ "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 - 1875, Pages 1037 and 1038," *American Memory*, The Library of Congress.

<<https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llac&fileName=035/llac035.db&recNum=516>> March 24, 2021.

⁶⁶ John C. Calhoun, "Slavery as a Positive Good," *Teaching American History*, Ashland University. <<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/slavery-a-positive-good>> March 24, 2021.

⁶⁷ "Cornerstone Speech," *American Battlefield Trust*. <<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/cornerstone-speech>> January 30, 2021.

⁶⁸ "Constitution of the Confederate States, Article IV, Section 3," *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School: Lillian Goldman Law Library (2008) <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_csa.asp> September 10, 2021.

⁶⁹ Rubin, 170.

⁷⁰ "Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union."

⁷¹ "The Declaration of Causes of Seceding States," *American Battlefield Trust*.

<<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/declaration-causes-seceding-states#Georgia>>

regarding the Missouri Compromise,⁷² therefore lending the authority of the Founding Fathers to their argument. However, while relying on their names, the Confederacy did not hesitate to call their reasoning erroneous in their opinion on the morality of slavery; in the Cornerstone Address, Stephens dismissed the Jeffersonian premise of equality of all men as “fundamentally wrong,” corrected by the new Confederate Constitution to a guaranteed status of slaves.⁷³

By thus invoking the image of the birth of the United States and simultaneously “improving” the original “imperfections,” the Confederacy sought to evoke a sense of patriotic faithfulness to the essential principles of America in their discourse, but also to convey a message that while the people and institutions of the Southern Confederacy were the true and legitimate legacy of the American Revolution, they were simultaneously the improved version of the original democratic experiment. United in their consensus on racial hierarchy and slave-driven economy, they upheld George Washington's final warning to the American citizens of “the danger of parties in the State,”⁷⁴ in the abolishment of political parties⁷⁵ and ban on import taxes to protect the export of cotton, the most important and lucrative article of the Southern economy.⁷⁶ The key issue, however, was maintaining slavery and expanding it further on the American continent, and white supremacy. White supremacy was thoroughly essential to the economic, political, and social order of the South, and integral to the existence of the Confederacy.⁷⁷

⁷² While Jefferson contested that slavery should be governed by individual states, not by the Congress, Madison recognized the constitutionality of the Compromise but feared that it could split the Union.

⁷³ Cornerstone speech.

⁷⁴ “Washington's Farewell Address,” *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School: Lillian Goldman Law Library (2008). <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp>

⁷⁵ “Constitution of the Confederate States,” Article I, Section 1

⁷⁶ “Constitution of the Confederate States,” Article I, Section 8

⁷⁷ Rubin, 171.

In his description of the Lost Cause, Bonekemper claims that the roots of the “most successful propaganda campaign in American history” originated long before the beginning of the war; the effort to justify slavery as necessary and right stemmed both from the economic value of slaves to the Southern agricultural system, and from the benefits of social superiority clearly based on white supremacy, which benefited the slaveowners as well as the white majority who did not own slaves.⁷⁸ According to the U.S. 1860 Census, Southern slaveholder families formed about 31% of the free Southern population, ranging from owners of individuals to large plantations with over one thousand slaves.⁷⁹ The Southern society consisted primarily of middle-class yeomen farmers, but as nearly one third of the Southern population directly owned slaves and provided opportunity for employment, economic ties to the system spread over the South. There was however also an important ideological emphasis. Racism provided the shared identity across the white classes: though poor, still better than a slave. Employing scientific racism to explain the social status of different races, and by showing the necessity of slavery due to the innate biological inferiority of “the Negro,” the slaveholders were able to control and perpetuate a strict racial hierarchy which rested on racial purity, stereotypes, and forced black submissiveness.

As historian Lorri Glover points out, “gentlemen slaveholders could believe that ‘all men are created equal’ because all *white* men were equal in that they would never be black and so could never be enslaved;” and even the poorest white layman willingly participated in the institutions of slavery and racism because he benefited from his racial superiority to the slave in his social status and opportunities for self-realization.⁸⁰ Furthermore, as historian Stephen V. Ash writes, the Civil War induced new racial competition of African Americans

⁷⁸ Bonekemper, 255-7.

⁷⁹ Kathryn L. Mackay, “Selected Statistics on Slavery in the United States,” *Weber State University*. <https://faculty.weber.edu/kmackay/selected_statistics_on_slavery_i.htm> November 28, 2021.

⁸⁰ Glover, 28; Brogan, 296.

for the living conditions previously reserved for the white race, including jobs, land, and education, which “not only drove a wedge between the white and black lower classes (to the disadvantage of both), [but] also bound upper- and lower- class whites in a Procrustean unity.”⁸¹ This unity in white supremacy easily carried on past the Civil War through Jim Crow into the era of segregation.

1.2 The Civil War: The Aftermath

Southern states wanted to secede to protect slavery, and then refused to admit this fact when they lost. The formation of a new collective identity of the Confederates then also strengthened the need for the justification of the loss of that identity. The formerly Confederate South saw itself as the nation of true heirs of the Founding Fathers, though their ideals related only to its white population, and equated its defeat with federal tyranny. Reasons suggested by historians for the emergence of the Lost Cause after the war are diverse: some emphasize that its ideology stems from a need to reconcile the experience of the defeat with the aftermath of the war;⁸² to legitimize the immense economic burden of the war and the eradicated institution of slavery;⁸³ to promote a culture of national reunion,⁸⁴ or to reestablish the old hierarchies of white supremacy and elitism in the new conditions of black enfranchisement and Southern reunion with the North.⁸⁵

All explanations however intersect in its function as a shared defense mechanism, a crutch against the background of the newly established social order during the Reconstruction era, where dictated white supremacy in the South was not only justified, but also necessary. As sociologist Jeffrey K. Olick writes, collective memory is the source of political

⁸¹ Stephen V. Ash, “Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Feb., 1991): 59. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2209873>> February 17, 2021.

⁸² Foster, 6.

⁸³ Bonekemper, 3.

⁸⁴ Rubin, 171; Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, 266.

⁸⁵ Ash, 59.

legitimation,⁸⁶ and it is the issue of the Confederacy's legitimacy not only to the South, but also to the rest of the world, that is at the heart of the matter. As noted by historian Ulrich B. Phillips, a renowned scholar of Southern history, the central theme of Southern history had been “a common resolve indomitably maintained – that it shall be and remain a white man's country.”⁸⁷ While slavery had been banished, white supremacy would reign on. From this historical creed, the Southern white nationalist identity has been shaped, and is being shaped still.

According to Olick, accounts of the collective memory of a group are predominantly memories of those within the group “with access to the means of cultural production or whose opinions are more highly valued.”⁸⁸ The post-war accounts of Southern veterans, historians, journalists, and other authors ameliorated the impact of white supremacy on the Civil War through selective remembering, revisionism, omission of facts, and retraction of previous statements, in order to create a narrative more acceptable to the American South. As individual pro-Confederates gathered and remembered the antebellum South, they remembered it in the context of pro-Confederate societies and prominent individuals who were positive towards the Southern domestic institutions. This narrative was subsequently advocated by postwar Confederate organizations. All of these groups and individuals produced cultural value in the South, and their opinion was important in the general discourse due to their immediate connection to the Confederacy through direct experience or blood.

The narrative originated with two advocates for the Confederate cause and white supremacy: journalist Edward A. Pollard and Jubal A. Early, the leader of the Confederate revitalization movement. Pollard framed the ethos of the Lost Cause in his post-war works

⁸⁶ Olick, 16.

⁸⁷ Ulrich B. Phillips, “The Central Theme of Southern History,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Oct., 1928): 31. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1836477>> February 18, 2021.

⁸⁸ Olick, 24.

such as *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates*, where he presented slavery as a benevolent communal institution which had “established in the South a peculiar and noble type of civilization,”⁸⁹ and *The Lost Cause Regained*, where he described “the true hope of the South” as “the contest for the supremacy of the white man, and with it the preservation of the dearest political traditions of the country.”⁹⁰ Early continued with the rhetoric of white supremacy in his work *The Heritage of the South*, where he staunchly defended slavery as “a blessing to the negroes”⁹¹ and “the greatest missionary success.”⁹² Jefferson Davis and Alexander Stephens also supported the Lost Cause narrative through their own post-war writings.⁹³ Through revision of the accounts of slavery to portray the institution as distinctly good for both white and black population in the South on the basis of black inferiority, the discourse supported the later attempts in the South to reinstate white supremacy despite abolition.

Toward the late 1890s, interest in the Lost Cause movement boomed due to increasing anxiety over the new social order in the South. With the abolition of slavery, the fixed antebellum hierarchy was destroyed, and the federal Freedman's Bureau actively assisted African Americans with emancipation; white racial supremacy in the South was therefore threatened both by the independence of the former slaves, and by the federal government. In a political battle between the Democratic Party and the Populists in the South, the Democratic Party adopted the motto “White Supremacy for the Right” and defined itself as the white party of black disenfranchisement. Lynchings and segregation were on the rise as the means

⁸⁹ E. A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York, 1867): 50.

⁹⁰ E. A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause Regained* (New York, 1868): 19.

⁹¹ Jubal A. Early, *The Heritage of the South* (Press of Brown-Morrison Co: Lynchburg: 1915): 15.

⁹² Early, 116.

⁹³ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (1881) and Alexander Stephens, *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States*.

to restore former social order. As Ash writes, “with the return of peace, southern elites were determined that the top rail must be restored to its accustomed place.”⁹⁴

The Lost Cause as a national myth was primarily established by the postwar Southern institutions agreeable to its rhetoric: the Southern Historical Society (founded 1870), the United Confederate Veterans (1889), the United Daughters of the Confederacy (1894), the Sons of Confederate Veterans (1896), and other pro-Confederate organizations in the South, including newspapers such as *The Confederate Veteran*. United by the common goal of remembering and celebrating the history of the antebellum era and the Confederacy, these institutions sponsored memorials, literature, and gatherings to commemorate the Lost Cause. Submitting to the general public “the ideals of southern, American, and racial identity that they celebrated,”⁹⁵ they shaped the identity of white Southerners through the construction of a collective identity and identification with the legacy of the Confederacy, which helped to create and justify the politics of segregation in the South.

In what historian Fred Arthur Bailey called a “campaign for historical revisionism” set to defend the social and institutional order of the antebellum South,⁹⁶ the pro-Confederate organizations shaped the academic and historic discourse on Southern history in favor of the Lost Cause narrative through not only the building of monuments, but also through an extensive influence on academia across the states; including a list of approved and offending

⁹⁴ Ash, 59.

⁹⁵ Joan Marie Johnson, “‘Drill Into Us... the Rebel Tradition’: The Contest over Southern Identity in Black and White Women’s Clubs, South Carolina, 1898-1930,” *The Journal of Southern History* Vol. 66, No. 3 (August 2000): 526. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2587867>> March 26, 2021.

⁹⁶ Fred Arthur Bailey, “Free Speech and the Lost Cause in the Old Dominion,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 103, No. 2 (April 1995): 238. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4249508>> February 17, 2021.

school textbooks, lobbying for the regulation of historical literature, the harassment of dissenting intellectuals, and a language of white supremacy.⁹⁷

The United Confederate Veterans' History Committee was formed in 1892 to establish a "true" history of the South and the Confederacy. The committee denied any relationship between the Northern abolitionist crusade and the Civil War,⁹⁸ and insisted on the aggression of the North as the true cause of the war, thus equating the current Southern troubles with federal tyranny, and laying the ground for Southern white nationalist discourse. Books which did not hold up to the standards of the Lost Cause were labeled "Unjust to the South" and replaced with more acceptable literature in Southern schools, libraries, and institutions. United Daughters of Confederacy's Mildred Lewis Rutherford's manual *A Measuring Rod to Test Text Books, and Reference Books in Schools, Colleges and Libraries* contains instructions such as "Reject a book that says the South fought to hold her slaves. Reject a book that speaks of the slaveholder of the South as cruel and unjust to his slaves,"⁹⁹ and claims that "the servants were very happy in their life upon the old plantations."¹⁰⁰ The United Daughters of Confederacy also notoriously supported the Ku Klux Klan as a means of defense of white women,¹⁰¹ and the protection of the chastity of the "Southern Belle."¹⁰²

Apart from textbooks, the pro-Confederate organizations celebrated symbols of the Confederacy, the battle flag and the iconic figures: Robert E. Lee, "Stonewall" Jackson,

⁹⁷ Fred Arthur Bailey, "The Textbooks of the 'Lost Cause': Censorship and the Creation of Southern State Histories," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (Fall 1991): 512-518. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40582363>> February 17, 2021

⁹⁸ Foster, 4.

⁹⁹ Mildred Lewis Rutherford, *A Measuring Rod to Test Text Books, and Reference Books in Schools, Colleges and Libraries* (United Confederate Veterans: Athens, 1920): 5. <<https://archive.org/details/measuringrodtot00ruth>> mode/2up> March 26, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Rutherford, 10.

¹⁰¹ Defense of white womanhood from the threat of interracial relationships ensured the protection of white racial purity and thus white supremacy. For white supremacists like the KKK, it also justified brutal violence towards African Americans.

¹⁰² Mildred Lewis Rutherford, *Address Delivered by Miss Mildred Lewis Rutherford* (United Daughters of the Confederacy: Athens, 1915) <<https://archive.org/details/addressdelivered04ruth>> page/28 mode/2up> March 27, 2021.

Jefferson Davis, presented as “remarkable and saintly creatures”¹⁰³ according to Nolan. The nameless soldiers who fought and died for the Confederacy, especially in relation to individual people's ancestry, are also revered. As lynchings and waves of white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan spread in the South, the pro-Confederate organizations planted memorials to the Lost Cause wherever they could, emphasizing that what Southern public memory celebrated was its white supremacist ancestry, and wherever possible, the South would fight to reinstate this social order.

Though distinctly Southern, the power of the Lost Cause also influenced the North and ensured that monuments were built all over the United States. Colleges and schools, counties and cities, roads, lakes, parks, and holidays named after Confederates dominate the American landscape; over 700 monuments have been erected since the end of the war.¹⁰⁴ The inscriptions are dedicated to “the heroes who [...] died defending the noble cause.”¹⁰⁵ They read the likes of “it is a duty we owe to posterity to see that our children shall know the virtues and become worthy of their sires,”¹⁰⁶ “No nation rose so white and fair: None fell so pure of crime,”¹⁰⁷ and “As at Thermopylae, the greater glory was to the vanquished.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Nolan, 18.

¹⁰⁴ “Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, February 1, 2019 <<https://www.splcenter.org/20190201/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy#Download%20the%20data>> March 28, 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Confederate Soldier Memorial (sculpture), *Smithsonian Art Inventories Catalog*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2020
<<https://siris-artinventories.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=15WQ7H5431669.2868&profile=ariall&source=~!sirartinventories&view=subscriptionsummary&uri=full=3100001~!328690~!31&ri=1&aspect=power&menu=search&ipp=20&spp=20>> March 28, 2021

¹⁰⁶ Wilcox County Confederate Monument (sculpture), *Smithsonian Art Inventories Catalog*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2020
<<https://siris-artinventories.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=X5113805V10I0.403&profile=ariall&source=~!sirartinventories&view=subscriptionsummary&uri=full=3100001~!335475~!61>> March 28, 2021.

¹⁰⁷ Richmond County Confederate Monument (sculpture), *Smithsonian Art Inventories Catalog*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2020
<<https://siris-artinventories.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=133W5320Y7965.4934&profile=ariall&source=~!sirartinventories&view=subscriptionsummary&uri=full=3100001~!335465~!10&ri=2&aspect=Browse&menu=search&ipp=20&spp=20&staffonly=&term=Outdoor+Sculpture++Georgia++Augusta&index=OBJEC&uindex=&aspect=Browse&menu=search&ri=2>> March 28, 2021.

¹⁰⁸ “Yazoo County Civil War Monument,” *American Legion*, November 25, 2018
<<https://www.legend.org/memorials/243980/yazoo-county-civil-war-monument>> March 28, 2021.

According to Heather A. O'Connell and Danequa L. Forrest of the Louisiana State University, 59% of the Confederate monuments contain a Lost Cause inscription.¹⁰⁹ Through this memorialization, the collective memory of the Lost Cause gradually replaced the historical account of the Civil War. It also served to enforce white supremacist culture in the South.¹¹⁰

The adoption of the Confederate battle flag by the pro-Confederates as an emblem of Southern heritage not only preserved the symbol into the 21st century, but also had a secondary effect; the preservation of the battle flag also preserved the values for which it were raised, the defense of slavery and glorification of white supremacy. The Lost Cause ideology however denies this, citing the flag's importance to the "legacy"¹¹¹ of the South, while also removing its intrinsic connection to the white Southern nationalism. As historian Kevin Thornton writes, Confederate symbols reflect historical events as well as its contemporary context and the use of its memory by neo-Confederates.¹¹²

The pro-Confederate organizations tied Southern identity to a specific collective memory of the Confederacy, their shared heritage through a specifically altered memory of the Civil War, and a pro-Confederate interpretation of the past.¹¹³ The durability of memorials and the longevity of the use of Lost Cause-sympathizing textbooks shaped the historical perspective of many subsequent generations.¹¹⁴ Historian Ulrich B. Phillips also perpetuated

¹⁰⁹ Heather A. O'Connell and Danequa L. Forrest, "Confederate Monument Inscriptions: Different Times, Different Places, Different Messages," *DuBois Review* (2020): 81.
<<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/du-bois-review-social-science-research-on-race/article/confederate-monument-inscriptions/65B3FE2F66419C759D8F652E661C4B8F>> March 28, 2021.

¹¹⁰ Kevin M. Levin, "Richmond's Confederate Monuments Were Used to Sell a Segregated Neighborhood," *The Atlantic*, June 11, 2020
<<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/its-not-just-the-monuments/612940/>> September 9, 2021.

¹¹¹ Ben Jones, "The Confederate Flag Is a Matter of Pride and Heritage, Not Hatred," *The New York Times*, December 22, 2015
<<https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/06/19/does-the-confederate-flag-breed-racism/the-confederate-flag-is-a-matter-of-pride-and-heritage-not-hatred>> September 1, 2021.

¹¹² Kevin Thornton, "The Confederate Flag and the Meaning of Southern History," *Southern Cultures*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter 1996): 234. JSTOR <www.jstor.org/stable/26235412> March 21, 2021.

¹¹³ Thornton, 237.

¹¹⁴ Mary Lynn Bayliss, "Magill, Mary Tucker," *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Humanities, University of Virginia, 2021 <<https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/magill-mary-tucker-1830-1899>> March 26, 2021; Greg

the myth of benevolent slavery and innate racial inequality in his influential study *American Negro Slavery*. Though comprehensive, the book simultaneously provided its readers with a description of slavery as a “pleasurable responsibility”¹¹⁵ and the widely spread “Sambo” stereotype of a slave: infantile, docile, lazy, immensely devoted to his “Massa”, and ultimately subhuman. According to historian John W. Blassingame, this stereotype was so pervasive because of “the desire of white to relieve themselves of the anxiety of thinking about slaves as men,”¹¹⁶ which would mean that they are equal to white men, as stated by the Declaration of Independence. In his work, Phillips provided scholarly historical support for the Lost Cause narrative as well as promoted white supremacy through perpetuating the caricatures of African Americans.

Finally, the Lost Cause became embodied by the Pulitzer-winning Margaret Mitchell's 1937 novel *Gone With the Wind* and the subsequent 1939 Hollywood adaptation of the same name; in its depiction of slavery, the romance exhibited unintentional schizophrenia. On the one hand, it participated in the reproduction of the nostalgia displayed by pro-Confederate organizations, and by Phillips' account of benevolent masters and loyal servants, where slaves were content and stupid. On the other hand, Mitchell also found inspiration in Thomas F. Dixon Jr.'s Ku Klux Klan trilogy, where African Americans had bestial qualities of sexual obsession with white women, and the Ku Klux Klan knights served to protect the Southern belle as well as the purity of the superior white race.¹¹⁷ As Nolan writes, Mitchell's story

Huffman, “Twisted Sources: How Confederate propaganda ended up in the South's schoolbooks,” *Facing South*, Institute for Southern Studies (April 10, 2019) <<https://www.facingsouth.org/2019/04/twisted-sources-how-confederate-propaganda-ended-souths-schoolbooks>> March 27, 2021.

¹¹⁵ Ulrich B. Phillips, “American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime,” *The American South: A Reader and Guide*, ed. Daniel Letwin (Edinburg University Press, 2013): 88.

¹¹⁶ John W. Blassingame, “The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South,” *The American South: A Reader and Guide*, ed. Daniel Letwin (Edinburg University Press, 2013): 91.

¹¹⁷ Margaret Mitchell, “Letter to Thomas Dixon, 15 August 1936,” *Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind Letters, 1936-1949*, ed. Richard Harwell (New York: Macmillan, 1976) 52-53.

“idealized the men and women of the plantation class, suggested the superior valor of Southern manhood, and is strongly peopled with happy slaves and gentle and indulgent masters.”¹¹⁸

Mitchell's heroine Scarlett O'Hara therefore defended the “peculiar institution” against the bigoted, condescending, and completely deluded Northern carpetbaggers,¹¹⁹ while her cavalier love interest and her gentleman husband both joined the Ku Klux Klan¹²⁰ to defend the purity of southern white women from rape by the apish, liberated slaves. As the novel became an instant classic of both American literature and cinematography as well as the highest-grossing movie of its time,¹²¹ it remains a cultural icon of the Lost Cause propaganda to this day. Dickson's white supremacist work therefore not only contributed largely to the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in the American South in 1915, but also to one of the most influential literary depictions of the American South in the 20th century.¹²²

Gone With the Wind is a prime example of how the Lost Cause dives into a deeply nostalgic remembrance of the antebellum South as a kind of prosperous rural Arcadia, in a form of regionalist exceptionalism which flourished through the Southern states, and continues to influence the Lost Cause discourse to this day. In her study of modern neo-Confederate veneration for Confederate practices and artifacts, historian Nicole Maurantonio dubs this narrative a case of “Confederate exceptionalism” and claims:

Fusing elements of Lost Cause ideology and American exceptionalism, the myth of Confederate exceptionalism nostalgically remembers ‘the South’ through an amalgam of embodied and textual

¹¹⁸ Nolan, 17.

¹¹⁹ Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (New York: Pocket Books, 1966): 558.

¹²⁰ Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 657. Replaced by “secret political meetings” in the movie.

¹²¹ Coincidentally, this record was previously held by *The Birth of the Nation*, a 1915 movie adaptation of Thomas F. Dixon Jr.'s novels.

¹²² Diane Roberts, “The Great-Granddaddy of White Nationalism,” *Southern Cultures* Vol. 25, No. 3: Left/Right (Fall 2019), Center for the Study of the American South..

<<https://www.southerncultures.org/article/the-great-granddaddy-of-white-nationalism>> January 28, 2021; Mitchell, “Letter to Thomas Dixon, 15 August 1936,” 52-53.

practices that alternately embrace and revise the Confederacy's racial history.¹²³

The antebellum Southerners boldly believed in their future. Before the Civil War, the South had experienced an unparalleled period of affluence in cotton production. Cotton profits were to ride to unprecedented heights during the fifties,¹²⁴ and Southern cotton not only dominated the U.S. export, but also constituted a majority of the global supply.¹²⁵ The prices of slaves accordingly increased, and even revived an interest in the possibility of new slave import from West Africa. The abundance of the 1850s bolstered the Southern states' bravado in the subsequent secession, as well as their faith in the Confederacy's future success. As may be seen in the contemporary manuscripts, the South saw the new Confederacy as the future of the South,¹²⁶ a viable nation based on black subjugation and white supremacy which was so profitable it was worth seceding for. The claim asserted by the Lost Cause that the South would have given up slavery is therefore baseless, especially in the light of the Confederacy forming as a defense of the "peculiar institution."

Ultimately, many Confederate soldiers fought and sacrificed much for their liberty, their way of life, and the new nation into which they had put their hopes. The new Southern national identity, joined with the movement which emerged for the preservation of the domestic institution of slavery, developed far beyond the issue of slavery. Despite the fact that the Confederacy lasted only four years, the Southerners soon became strongly attached to their nation; Rubin argues that this Confederate identity has outlived that nation-state and that

¹²³ Nicole Maurantonio, *Confederate Exceptionalism: Civil War Myth and Memory in the Twenty-First Century* (University Press of Kansas, 2019): 2.

¹²⁴ Brogan, 307.

¹²⁵ Sven Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War," *American Historical Review* Vol. 109 No. 5 (2004): 1405. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/530931>> March 27, 2021.

¹²⁶ Michael T. Bernath, "The Confederacy as a Moment of Possibility," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (May 2013): 337-8. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23795559>> January 28, 2021.

connection has endured for generations.¹²⁷ This is one of the reasons why the Lost Cause is such a persistent narrative. In their letters and diaries, white Southerners expressed a potent belief in the righteousness of the Confederacy:

They say right always triumphs, but what cause could have been more just than ours? [...] Let us suffer still more – give up yet more – anything, anything that will help the cause – anything that will give us freedom and not force us to live with such people...¹²⁸

But as Thornton writes, “the tragedy of the 1840s and 1850s – ultimately the tragedy of the Civil War – was that the southern conception of liberty became hopelessly entangled with the defense of slaveowners' rights.”¹²⁹ According to historian C. Vann Woodward, tragedy, defeat, and poverty, are a major part of Southern heritage;¹³⁰ strong emotional attachment to a dead nation and a romanticized version of the Southern past seemed to provide a remedy – mutually supported with literature, Confederate memorials, and segregation. Nationalism grows from insecurity, and the white South, recovering from the Civil War, was anxious enough.

White supremacy and slavery were essential to the social, political, and economic order of the antebellum South, to the point of taking up arms for it. Although black emancipation and citizenship were secured with the passage of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendment, no catharsis of racial relations was ultimately achieved in the Civil War, nor during its aftermath. Slavery was abolished, but the South soon replaced it with the segregation laws of Black Codes and Jim Crow as well as with the historical negationism of

¹²⁷ Rubin, 169-175.

¹²⁸ Emma LeConte, “Diary 1864-1865,” *Documenting the American South, or, The Southern Experience in 19th-century America*, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <<https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/leconteemma/leconte.html>> February 8, 2021.

¹²⁹ Thornton, 240.

¹³⁰ Woodward, 333.

the Lost Cause, where the narrative and the legislative mutually reinforced each other in the suppression of African Americans and promotion of white supremacy.

Through its emphasis on Southern values, the postwar narrative of the Lost Cause aided the formation of white Southern identity and contributed to the specificity of white Southern nationalism. The collective white Southern memory of the Civil War and the antebellum period was shaped by the Confederate organizations, who were perpetuating the myth of the Lost Cause through public commemoration and public education. The Lost Cause emerged as a pro-white national myth of the ex-Confederate states, which served as the foundation stone of white Southern nationalism, like the organization of the League of the South. Controversies surrounding Confederate symbols such as the battle flag and memorials show the Lost Cause's persistence in the modern South and the influence of this collective Southern memory on white Southern nationalism. Its legacy fuels white Southern nationalism in various organizations, such as the secessionist League of the South.

The next chapter will examine the manifestation of the narrative of the Lost Cause in the white Southern nationalist rhetoric of the League of the South as presented on their website, *LeagueOfTheSouth.com*, and how it represents the collective memory of the organization.

2. The League of the South as a Case Study of White Southern Nationalism

The League of the South is a white Southern nationalist organization whose goal is the secession of “the South” from the United States,¹³¹ and the construction of a new nation-state as “a free and independent Southern republic,”¹³² on the basis of Anglo-Celtic identity and conservative traditionalism. The League endorses a version of Southern culture based on traditionally conservative, orthodox Christian values as embodied by the Old South,¹³³ and promotes white ethnicity as descendants of their selectively Anglo-Celtic ancestors who had settled the old Southern colonies. In their collective memory of this Anglo-Celtic identity and secessionist intents, the League of the South formulates white Southern nationalism as shaped by the narrative of the Lost Cause, and also exhibits a strong opposition to the contemporary federal government of the United States, an affiliation to the legacy of the Founding Fathers, and tendencies of white globalism.

The League resides in Killen, Alabama, and has been active since June 25, 1994.¹³⁴ It was founded by a group of Southern intellectuals (Michael Hill, Grady McWhiney, Forrest McDonald), with many founding members also being members of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans. Michael Hill, a former history professor specializing in Celtic history at the predominantly black Stillman College, remains its president and spokesperson.¹³⁵ According to its own website, the original intent of the League was to “lay a moral historical

¹³¹ Consisting of the once-Confederate states and the states of Missouri, Maryland, Kentucky, and Oklahoma.

¹³² *League of the South*, 2014. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com>> February 8, 2021.

¹³³ Barry J. Balleck, “The League of the South,” *Hate Groups and Extremist Organizations in America: An Encyclopedia* (ABC-CLIO: Santa Barbara, 2019): 187.

¹³⁴ Under the name the Southern League, renaming itself three years later following a lawsuit threat from a baseball league already using this name.

¹³⁵ *League of the South*, Southern Poverty Law Center. <<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/league-south>> February 10, 2021.

foundation for [...] a free and independent South” on the basis of making a “historic case for the rightness of the South’s cause from 1860-65, particularly the right of secession, and the error of the North’s opposition to Southern independence.”¹³⁶ From the beginning, the League was opposed to the federal government that was “too far gone to reform,”¹³⁷ and dedicated to a second secession on the basis of a historical right of the “Southern nation” to a “self-determination unfettered by the political influence of blacks and others” it believed to have been confirmed by the Confederacy.¹³⁸ However, many original members, including the founders McWhiney and McDonald, have since left the organization due to its increasingly racist and anti-Semitic worldviews.¹³⁹

The organization presents itself on its official website, *LeagueOfTheSouth.com*, though older papers may refer to the original website, *DixieNet.org*.¹⁴⁰ It distributes its own quarterly magazine, *The Free Magnolia*,¹⁴¹ and sells merchandise with its own logo, the Black Cross of Southern Nationalism. Since 2013, when the League started employing the strategy of street presence, it has become more prominent on the white nationalist scene through public gatherings to protest immigration¹⁴² and taking down Confederate monuments,¹⁴³

¹³⁶ Michael Hill, “Past, Present, and Future,” *League of the South*, July 19, 2016. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/past-present-and-future/>> October 21, 2021.

¹³⁷ “Why Southern Nationalism?”

¹³⁸ Michael Hill, “A Plausible Lie: A Critique of ‘The South Was Right!'” *League of the South*, June 29, 2016 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/a-plausible-lie-a-critique-of-the-south-was-right/>> October 23, 2021.

¹³⁹ Southern Poverty Law Center; Michael Hill, “A Note to My Critics,” *League of the South*, April 25, 2018 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/a-note-to-my-critics/>> November 13, 2021.

¹⁴⁰ This address now redirects to the new one, established in 2014. The new website also contains archived posts from the original website.

¹⁴¹ This magazine is behind a paywall. While writing this thesis, I have made a conscious decision not to contribute to the funds of a white nationalist organization, and therefore decided not to purchase any issues of *The Free Magnolia*. In writing this thesis, I rely solely on freely accessible materials through which I have not supported the League of the South's efforts.

¹⁴² League of the South, “League of the South Protests Immigration in Alabama,” *Youtube*, uploaded by RedShirtArmy, July 9, 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IPUlyIqn0g&t=13s>> October 12, 2021.

¹⁴³ WWL-TV, “League of the South President Speaks with WWLTV on Preserving the Confederate Monuments,” *Youtube*, uploaded by WWL-TV, May 7, 2017 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uC7zrDen4M>> October 12, 2021.

partaking in demonstrations,¹⁴⁴ and sponsored messages on billboards¹⁴⁵ (which have since been taken down). It is the self-described “largest, most organized, and foremost advocate for the Southron [sic] people in a day and age that is growing increasingly hostile to our very existence.”¹⁴⁶

Shaped by the historic experience of the South as determined by the “noble souls”¹⁴⁷ of the Confederacy and damaged by “a century and a half of Reconstruction,”¹⁴⁸ the League is dedicated to “promoting the survival, well-being, and independence of the Southern people”¹⁴⁹ and the defense of its culture against “the unholy leftist trinity of ‘tolerance, diversity, and multiculturalism’”,¹⁵⁰ brought upon the South by the federal “American Empire.”¹⁵¹ According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the League is a white supremacist hate group supporting neo-Confederate ideals, whose “‘godly’ nation [...] would be run by an ‘Anglo-Celtic’ (read: white) elite that would [...] politically dominate black people and other minorities.”¹⁵² The League openly admits their intent to make the South into a “White Man’s Land once again,”¹⁵³ and forefronts white supremacy as a vital part of being a (white) Southerner.

This chapter focuses on white Southern nationalism and the Lost Cause as embodied

¹⁴⁴ “Two Years Ago, They Marched in Charlottesville. Where Are They Now?” *Anti-Defamation League*, August 9, 2019 <<https://www.adl.org/blog/two-years-ago-they-marched-in-charlottesville-where-are-they-now>> October 23, 2021.

¹⁴⁵ Michael Hill, “New LS Billboard in Tuscaloosa, Alabama,” *League of the South*, July 30, 2014 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/new-ls-billboard-in-tuscaloosa-alabama/>> October 23, 2021.

¹⁴⁶ *League of the South*.

¹⁴⁷ “The Southern Nation,” *League of the South*, 2014 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-southern-nation/>> September 8, 2021.

¹⁴⁸ “The Great Divide,” *League of the South*, 2014 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-great-divide/>> September 8, 2021.

¹⁴⁹ “Why Southern Nationalism.”

¹⁵⁰ “Liberal Democracy v. Organic Nationalism as an Organizing Principle of the South,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/liberal-democracy-v-organic-nationalism-as-an-organizing-principle-for-the-south/>> September 8, 2021.

¹⁵¹ “What is the League of the South,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/what-is-ls/>> February 8, 2021.

¹⁵² *League of the South*, Southern Poverty Law Center.

¹⁵³ Michael Hill, “My Pledge of Allegiance,” *League of the South*, August 18, 2016. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/michael-hill-my-pledge-of-allegiance/>> October 18, 2021; Michael Hill, “League of the South’s Statement on Southern White Nationalism,” *League of the South*, February 4, 2018. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/ls-statement-on-southernwhite-nationalism/>> October 4, 2021.

by the League of the South, and will provide an analysis of the League's self-perception as the "defenders of the blood."¹⁵⁴ Through a discourse analysis of written text provided on their official website, the chapter will examine their identification as members of Southern Anglo-Celtic white ethnicity in relation to their selective Southern history, as well as their hostility against the U.S. federal government and multiculturalism in the South on the basis of this identity. In order to do this, some historical context to white nationalism first needs to be given.

2.1 The League of the South in its Historical Context

As sociologist Stacia Gilliard-Matthews writes, like many movements, white supremacists are products of their environment; their activity coincides with the advancement of civil rights and democratic progress in the United States.¹⁵⁵ Due to an amalgam of economic, cultural, and political reasons, the ideology of the movement is gradually changing. In their study of the white separatist movement in the United States, sociologists Betty A. Dobratz and Stephanie L. Shanks-Meile write that the collapse of slavery and the desegregation of the American society have caused white supremacists to gradually move from attempts at total domination of other races to the goal of complete removal of either themselves, or other ethnic groups from the United States.¹⁵⁶ They identify the Ku Klux Klan as the basis of the white power movement, with the rise of neo-Nazis and Christian Identity providing impetus for the 20th century, and emphasize the diversity of individual factions among white extremists, which often overlap in their defining elements.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ "In Defense of Our Blood," *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/in-defense-of-our-blood/>> September 8, 2021.

¹⁵⁵ Stacia Gilliard-Matthews, "The Impact of the Economic Downturn, Immigrants, and Political Representation on White Supremacist Group Organization in the United States," *Sociological Focus*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (August 2011): 257-8. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41633889>> September 7, 2021.

¹⁵⁶ Betty A. Dobratz and Stephanie L. Shanks-Meile, *The White Separatist Movement in the United States: "White Power, White Pride!"* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London: 2000): ix-10.

¹⁵⁷ Dobratz, Shanks-Meile, 34.

The origins of Southern white nationalism as embodied by the League of the South can be traced to the original Ku Klux Klan, the first documented white supremacist group in the United States, founded as a fraternity for ex-Confederate officers directly after the Civil War.¹⁵⁸ Its members worked as self-appointed vigilantes of the white South, whose fundamental objective was the maintenance of white supremacy.¹⁵⁹ Though slavery was abolished at the time of the Klan's creation, the Klan worked to intimidate Black people in an effort to protect white racial hegemony, and the collective memory of the South fostered their endeavors.

Through the narrative of the Lost Cause, the Klan established themselves as the defenders of the superior antebellum Southern culture which was now being systematically replaced with a new order of racial equality, and targeted African Americans, the government, and civil rights supporters as perceived threats.¹⁶⁰ In combination with the commemorative efforts of other post-Confederate organizations aiding the formulation of the post-war white Southern identity, white nationalists in the South disseminated the nostalgic myth of the Lost Cause and enforced white racial dominance. As David S. Williams writes, "Lost Cause proponents preached the message that [...] victory would come if white southerners maintained their superior and pure culture."¹⁶¹

Though victory did not come as the KKK resistance against Reconstruction ended in 1871 when the organization was broken up during the federally organized South Carolina mass trials, by the end of the century, segregation was firmly in place throughout the United States.¹⁶² In its later resurrections during the 20th century, the Klan splintered into numerous

¹⁵⁸ Gilliard Matthews, 257.

¹⁵⁹ Durham, 37.

¹⁶⁰ Gilliard-Matthews, 257.

¹⁶¹ David S. Williams, "Lost Cause Religion," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, October 2, 2017 <<https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/lost-cause-religion>> February 8, 2021.

¹⁶² Durham, 5.

fractions, though the groups still dedicated themselves to fighting desegregation and retaining the purity of white Christian race, in order to “protect the home, the chastity of womanhood, and to exemplify a pure patriotism toward our glorious country.”¹⁶³ By the 1970s, a grouping called the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, led by white supremacist David Duke, argued for the right of white Americans to self-determination, and declared white Americans as a group oppressed on the basis of discrimination in employment and education,¹⁶⁴ a narrative by which he set a precedent for the League of the South's rhetoric twenty years later.

Other white supremacist groups – neo-Nazis, Christian Identity, neo-Confederates, and skinheads – mushroomed in the environment created by the 1960s and 1970s social civil rights movements; Southern Poverty Law Center notes the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 as the “harbingers of white dispossession and so-called 'white genocide' — the idea that whites in the United States are being systematically replaced and destroyed.”¹⁶⁵ To this extent, the movement follows the doctrine set by white supremacist David Lane, known as *Fourteen Words*, “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children,” which calls for immediate action to prevent white extinction.¹⁶⁶ This is the goal of the League of the South.

According to Cynthia Miller-Idriss, white supremacy, anti-government sentiment, and Christian extremism have played a major role in the American story since the early years. These radicalist ideas – alternately in the mainstream and on the fringes of society – resurfaced in the early 1990s with a series of violent confrontations between federal

¹⁶³ *Principles and Purposes of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Outlined by an Exalted Cyclos of the Order*, Michigan State University Library <<https://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/AmRad/principlespurposesknights.pdf>> September 29, 2021.

¹⁶⁴ Durham, 39.

¹⁶⁵ “White Nationalism,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*.

<<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/white-nationalist>> October 21, 2021.

¹⁶⁶ “14 Words,” *Anti-Defamation League*. <<https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/14-words>> October 21, 2021.

authorities and anti-government and/or religious extremist organizations.¹⁶⁷ By that time, the collapse of the USSR enabled a redirection of the U.S. political right's political program from combating communism to championing traditional moral values and ethnic-cultural homogeneity,¹⁶⁸ thus providing the movement with further direction. When the relationship between whiteness and power was being reestablished through demographic changes despite its resident normative identity of privilege,¹⁶⁹ white separatists movement came to dominate the US white power. In the same vein of white self-perception as a threatened population, in 1994, the League of the South was founded as a self-styled means of protection of Southerners against the threat of the federal government, preservation of cultural and historical heritage of the South, and the eventual achievement of Southern secession.¹⁷⁰

2.2 The League of the South and the Racial Survival of the Anglo-Saxon “White Ethnicity”

As per Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, connection of racial state with racial survival is frequent among white separatists, and the fundamental basis of the movement is to defend and promote the white race against perceived external threats.¹⁷¹ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, non-Hispanic whites are projected to no longer make up the majority of the U.S. population by 2045.¹⁷² United in their perception of their own collective identity, i.e. white

¹⁶⁷ Cynthia Miller-Idriss, “From 9/11 to 1/6: The War on Terror Supercharged the Far-Right,” *Foreign Policy* (September/October 2021): 54.

¹⁶⁸ Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (The Guilford Press: New York, 1995): 2.

¹⁶⁹ Euan Hague, Benito Giordano, Edward H. Sebesta, “Whiteness, Multiculturalism and Nationalist Appropriation of Celtic Culture: the Case of the League of the South and the Lega Nord,” *Cultural Geographies* (2005): 166.

¹⁷⁰ “A Declaration of Southern Independence,” *League of the South*.

<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/a-declaration-of-southern-independence/>> October 6, 2021.

¹⁷¹ Dobratz, Shanks-Meile, 102-114.

¹⁷² Jonathan Vespa, Lauren Medina, and David M. Armstrong, *Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections for 2020 to 2060*, U.S. Census Bureau, February 2020 <<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p25-1144.pdf>> 7. October 20, 2021.

Anglo-Celtic Christianity, as the correct ethnic heritage of the South, members of the League perceive that identity as wronged and endangered by other racial and ethnic minorities, a danger orchestrated by the federal government of the United States, and themselves as in dire need of defense against demographic changes in the South.

The Anglo-Celtic identity politics of the League of the South imply the heritage of white English-speaking Western Europeans, whose “natural superiority” they promote over other cultures.¹⁷³ By establishing race as the cause of culture, the League assigns white race as the cause of the glorified history of the Western Christian civilization.¹⁷⁴ As geographers Euan Hague, Benito Giordano, and historian Edward H. Sebesta establish, the problematically defined foundations of Celtic history and cultural identity enable the investment of various versions of political and cultural meanings into this heritage.¹⁷⁵ As they assert in their joint paper, in the case of the League of the South, “their usages of Celtic culture are synonymous with privileging a racially white population.”¹⁷⁶

The meaning derived from Anglo-Celtic identity of the League within the multiculturalist society of the United States is to be understood as a defense of an ethnic minority against perceived marginalization, however within the context of a nativist response to an increasingly diverse country.¹⁷⁷ In this way, the League's stylization of the South as a white Anglo-Celtic nation, culturally and ethnically endangered by non-white populations in the United States enabled by the federal government, is therefore vital to their self-perception as the heirs to the Confederacy, which authorized the dominance of white Southerners over African Americans, and consequently built an ideology based on the narrative of the Lost

¹⁷³ “Our Survival as People,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/our-survival-as-a-people/>> February 8, 2021.

¹⁷⁴ Dobratz, Shanks-Meile, 91.

¹⁷⁵ Hague, Giordano, Sebesta, 153-4.

¹⁷⁶ Hague, Giordano, Sebesta, 166.

¹⁷⁷ Hague, Giordano, Sebesta, 155.

Cause that claimed legitimacy of this social and racial order. In this self-positioning as white people wrongly threatened on their own turf, the League reproduces the powerful narrative of the Lost Cause for its modern audience, and thus lends an aura of historical credibility to its secessionist intentions.

The League also traces their Southern origins to the “the scouts, frontiersmen, and Indian fighters [...] the riflemen who defeated the British redcoats [and] took up arms in 1861 to form our own Southern nation,” coming from the western and northern European continent and what is now the Great Britain and Northern Ireland,¹⁷⁸ therefore claiming not only the white legacy of Western culture of the “Old World,” but also ancestry of settlers and rebels of the New Continent. Through this blending of European cultural legacy and American experience in the Southern geopolitical climate, the League’s identity politics form a distinct Southern version of American exceptionalism, which serves as the basis for their propagation of a Southern nation-state: by their association with their claim to the Anglo-Celtic heritage, the League positions itself as the superior nation in the South, and by selectively tracing their heritage to the original settlers and revolutionaries, they self-identify as the only racial group with historical claim to the South.

The League of the South’s claims of ethnicity and heritage therefore serve to establish the white Southerners as a specific minority within the United States, and provide the basis of their claim to the right for a separate nation-state. As Hague, Giordano, and Sebesta write, this appeal to cultural distinction allows the organization to establish themselves as defenders of their ethnic nation which deserves “what they envision as protection from cultural erasure and homogenization,”¹⁷⁹ a threat posed to the South by the Western politics of multinationalism. Gillard-Matthews points out the importance of extremists framing their discourse within

¹⁷⁸ “In Defense of Our Blood.”

¹⁷⁹ Hague, Giordano, Sebesta, 153.

socially acceptable constructs; such action enables white nationalists, like the League, to manipulate public culture and claim legitimacy for their organization.¹⁸⁰ This tactic has been previously used by the Klan leader David Duke, as mentioned before.

According to Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, it is a typical strategy of various movements to reframe or reinterpret key issues through the use of language in order to show their own point of view, and white separatists may “portray themselves as revolutionary patriots similar to those of the American Revolution.”¹⁸¹ The League frequently employs language evoking victimization of the Southerners and their way of life by the federal government and other ethnicities residing in the South, the “unholy crusade of leftist agitators and foreign religions.” The organization uses language of survival against external aggression, describing the increasing hostility against Southern people who are to be eliminated and purposefully replaced by their enemies, “people who hate the Bible [...] hate our ancestors [...] hate our families [...] with such passion they would stop at nothing to see our culture and bloodline eradicated forever,” aggression to which the only assurance of survival is to secede in order to protect the South from this ethnic and cultural genocide.¹⁸² Evoking a sense of urgency to resist the acute threat posed by the U.S. government and its policies, the League advocates that the immediate act of secession is imperative to protect the Southern collective identity, heritage, culture, ethnicity, and nation.

The language further serves to endorse a divisive collective identity of “us” versus “them,” where “us” stands for the Southern people of Anglo-Celtic heritage whose culture and very existence is under assault by “them,” the political elites of Washington D.C. who promote “godless multiculturalism and universalism”¹⁸³ that seeks to exterminate and

¹⁸⁰ Gilliard-Matthews, 259-260.

¹⁸¹ Dobratz, Shanks-Meile, 155-156.

¹⁸² *League of the South*.

¹⁸³ “Our Survival as People.”

substitute them with non-white minorities, predominantly namely Hispanic people; the organization argues that “they” are waging a new Southern “Reconquista” encouraged by Washington D.C. who is “bringing in a new, more compliant population from the third World to overwhelm and replace us.”¹⁸⁴

In his discussion on decolonization, cultural critic Edward W. Said distinguished between primary (physical, geographical) resistance, and secondary (ideological) resistance, which involves the reestablishment of positive values of a nation. As David Jansson writes, “We might think of the Civil War as constituting the primary resistance [of the South] whereas the League presently engages in ideological resistance, and that effort requires the (re)construction of a positive sense of what it means to be a 'Southerner.'”¹⁸⁵ This is demonstrated by the League's declarations of love for the Southern values and cultural heritage in opposition to the rest of the United States.¹⁸⁶

Employing a common strategy of white separatist movement, the League strives to reframe the organization's “hate group” label through vocalizing their emphasis on love over hate as the core value of the movement. In the League website's FAQ, to a question “Is the League of the South a hate group?” the League answers “We love our people and the South,” and rejects the term “racist” as “anti-White, anti Southern slur.”¹⁸⁷ In other articles, the League declares, “We love our own people better than anyone else,”¹⁸⁸ and condemns demonization for defending the white race in “a war for White survival.”¹⁸⁹ Through a

¹⁸⁴ “In Defense of Our Blood.”

¹⁸⁵ David Jansson, “Racialization and 'Southern' Identities of Resistance: A Psychogeography of Internal Orientalism in the United States,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (January 2010): 208-9. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40645341>> September 7, 2021.

¹⁸⁶ “Core Beliefs Statement of the League of the South,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/corebeliefs/>> September 8, 2021.

¹⁸⁷ “Most Frequently Asked Questions About the League of the South,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/faqs/>> September 8, 2021.

¹⁸⁸ “A Name and Place Among the Nations of Earth,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-southern-nation/>> September 10, 2021.

¹⁸⁹ “The War on Whiteness,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-war-on-whiteness/>> October 21, 2021.

“racialist view of reality” the organization also labels its opposition as the true “hate group” which purposefully targets the South.¹⁹⁰ With this approach, the League masks its racist messages of white supremacy under the cover of reactionary discourse of self-defense, and reflects the Lost Cause’s narrative of the South as unjustly attacked and dominated by the oppressive North that refused to respect the Southern ways, as well as reproduces the nostalgia felt by the proponents of the ideology towards the era of the antebellum South.

This disguise of hate for others as love for themselves, divisive rhetoric of “us” vs “them,” defiance of the federal government, and emphasis on own perceived white Southern ethnicity, is what Thornton dubs the “white southern self-conception as an embattled minority,”¹⁹¹ a group in need of resistance to external aggression. The portrayal of the Southern people as marginalized in their own states by the “perverse agenda”¹⁹² of the U.S. government places them in a defensive and therefore justified position to react as they see befitting. As the League states on its website, in a paraphrase of the Confederate president Jefferson Davis,

All we ever asked was to be left alone. But they didn't leave us alone, and they never will. They will never stop until they have erased every vestige of our Christianity, our South, and our Southern-ness from our land and our children, or until we separate ourselves from them.¹⁹³

This discourse of governmental tyranny and simultaneous formation of the collective identity of white Southern nationalists in the League as a Southern minority in need of rebellion against the tyrannical federal government, shows a kind of self-perception as historical figures deciding the fate of a nation like the descendants of the American

¹⁹⁰ Dobratz, Shanks-Meile, 156.

¹⁹¹ Thornton, 242.

¹⁹² “The Southern Nation.”

¹⁹³ “Reform Is Not Possible Nor Desirable,” *League of the South*.

<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/reform-is-not-possible/>> September 8, 2021;

Jefferson Davis, “Confederate States of America - Message to Congress April 29, 1861 (Ratification of the Constitution),” *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2008

<https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_m042961.asp> September 10, 2021.

Revolution and the Confederacy. It is no wonder that many of the articles on the League's website are signed with "Deo Vindice," the Confederate motto.¹⁹⁴

2.3 League of the South's Lost Cause and the Collective Memory of Southern Heritage

In its "Declaration of Southern Independence," the League of the South declares that, "Standing on our ancient rights and liberties, we declare that Southerners are entitled, like all peoples, to self-determination."¹⁹⁵ Similar to the Confederacy, the League of the South relies on imagery and language to depict the organization as the defenders of not only the Southern ethnicity and white hegemony in the South, but also of the Southern heritage. Here, two major historical points stand out: the principles of the U.S. government as set by the Founding Fathers, and the formation, existence, and fall of the Confederacy.

Through the lens of the Lost Cause, the League's self-conception as a nation under attack and in need of secession reflects the Confederate states' decision to secede from the Union. Invoking the Tenth Amendment, the League claims the South's Constitutional right to secession on the basis of "the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively."¹⁹⁶ In doing so, the League portrays the Confederacy as in the right and wronged by the Union's "invasion," and the South as the legitimate heirs of the American Revolution and the protectors of the original principles set by the Founding Fathers. According to the League, these principles were destroyed in the Civil War when "Lincoln placed the forced unity of the States above the

¹⁹⁴ "Core Beliefs Statement of the League of the South."

¹⁹⁵ Michael Hill, "A Declaration of Southern Independence, *League of the South*, June 25, 2021 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/a-declaration-of-southern-independence/>> September 20, 2021.

¹⁹⁶ "10th Amendment: Rights Reserved to States or People," *Interactive Constitution*, National Constitution Center, 2021 <<https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendment/amendment-x>> October 21, 2021.

Constitution itself, and this action set him in opposition to the principles of the American Founders,” marking the end of a Constitutional government in the United States.¹⁹⁷

In accordance with its proclaimed roots in revolution, the League's ideological resistance is readily supported by physical resistance, meaning taking up arms against the federal government should the League see it necessary. The League strongly identifies the South with rebellion and self-defense, denominating the Southerners as “defenders of the blood” on the historical basis of Southern heritage,¹⁹⁸ and repeatedly urges and even instructs its followers to prepare for war with the federal enemy,¹⁹⁹ even having twice attempted at creating its own paramilitary wings, the Indomitable and the Southern Defense Force.²⁰⁰ When discussing white nationalism, historian Kathleen Belew speaks of a “profound collapse of categories” that merges battlefield and homefront.²⁰¹ We may observe this example in the League's worldview, a Southern nation at war with the federal government and its tyrannical policies.

According to the League, the collective identity of the Southerners as ”fighting men [whose] blood has often been shed in defense of itself” requires the federal government to replace it with a minority that is easier to control, i.e. ethnicities of “lesser culture.” Echoing the origin story of the Confederacy, the League of the South formed in opposition to the “Yankee Empire”²⁰² forcing the South to accept the equality of other minorities. The organization perceives the federal government of the United States as a corrupt and

¹⁹⁷ Michael Hill, “On Secession and Southern Independence,” *League of the South*, October 5, 2021 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/from-our-archives-25/>> October 21, 2021.

¹⁹⁸ “In Defense of Our Blood.”

¹⁹⁹ “Twelve Fundamental Rules for Southern Nationalists,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/twelve-fundamental-rules-for-southern-nationalists/>> September 10, 2021.

²⁰⁰ Michael Hill, “Southern Defense Force Formed,” *League of the South*, February 2, 2017 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/southern-defense-force-formed/>> October 21, 2021; *League of the South*, Southern Poverty Law Center.

²⁰¹ Belew.

²⁰² “What is The League of the South,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/what-is-ls/>> September 8, 2021.

corrupting influence hostile to Southern culture. Through its corruption, the “regime” has illegitimized itself in the tradition of the founding political principle of the United States as formulated in the Declaration of Independence, that is, secession as “nothing more than the assertion of the inalienable right of a people to change their form of government whenever it ceases to fulfill the purposes for which it was created.”²⁰³ The League’s identification with the Confederate mindset leads it to proclaim that “the Founders’ Constitution is long dead and buried, replaced with a false document forged in the wake of the bloody subjugation of our Confederacy.”²⁰⁴

The League’s continuity with the legacy of the Confederacy, despite its proclamation that they are not a heritage defense group,²⁰⁵ provides the historical anchoring of the organization’s present interests: protection of Southern white ethnicity, and protection of the history of the Lost Cause. Like the Founding Fathers, the League of the South lists the “long train of abuses”²⁰⁶ from the U.S. federal government to the citizens of the Southern states, namely corruption of Christian morality through art and literature, state intervention in education, distortion of Southern symbols and history “to advance their ideas of social justice,” and demonization of Southern heroes.²⁰⁷ Drawing on its origins in the Confederacy, the League campaigns for secession in order to defend the Confederate battle flag as well as “monuments, battlefields, parks, cemeteries, street names, everything even remotely connected to the South and her history,”²⁰⁸ from what they define as a cultural genocide of the

²⁰³ Hill, “On Secession and Southern Independence.”

²⁰⁴ “The Southern Nation.”

²⁰⁵ “The League of the South’s Strategy,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/lss-strategy/>> September 15, 2021.

²⁰⁶ “Reform Is Not Possible Nor Desirable.”

²⁰⁷ “A Declaration of Southern Independence.”

²⁰⁸ Michael Hill, “The League and Southern Identity,” *League of the South*, July 4, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/890the-league-and-southern-identity/>> October 21, 2021.

Southern people through gradual demographic changes to the South as no longer dominated by white population, and historical revisionism.

Like the thirteen original colonies, instead of seeking to reform the “aggressive, centralised federal government,”²⁰⁹ the League advocates complete secession of the Southern states as they had joined the Confederacy, as well the states of Maryland, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kentucky,²¹⁰ and the establishment of a republic of sovereign Southern states. The right to self-determination on the basis of the Southern nation-state of Anglo-Celtic Christian cultural origin, i. e. “recasting a politics of white superiority as a Celtic nationalism committed to preserving the ancient Celtic culture and attaining a homeland territory”²¹¹ as per the League, constitutes not only protection from cultural erasure through increasingly changing demographics of a nation where white population is projected to become a minority within the next several decades,²¹² but primarily the political right of control over territory, to secession and the complete ethnic and cultural control of the new Southern Confederacy.

The League Declaration further evokes Southern heroes of both the Revolutionary and Confederate era; through juxtaposing the figures of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry next to John C. Calhoun, Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Stonewall Jackson, the League evokes a dual heritage of the South as the true adherents to the ideals of the American Revolution, and as the proud descendants of the Confederacy. Through the narrative of the Lost Cause, the South is portrayed as originally victimized by the Union which sought to overpower states' rights, and now again victimized by the federal government, which imposes “the poison of equality, multiculturalism, and leftist ideas of

²⁰⁹ “Core Beliefs Statement of the League of the South.”

²¹⁰ Where State chapters of the League have also been formed.

²¹¹ Hague, Giordano, Sebesta, 157.

²¹² U.S. Census Bureau.

diversity and tolerance”²¹³ upon the descendants of a distinctly white, Christian, conservative nation. Like the Confederate states which believed to be simultaneously the heirs to the Founding Fathers as well as an advanced version of their original intent, so does the League promote the idea of their own cultural superiority, but simultaneously proclaim to look “to the present and future”²¹⁴ in their independence. By recreating a double moment from the past of their ancestors, a sort of Colonial-Confederate rebellion against a tyranny, the League justifies its goal of secession in continuity with the past.

As literary theorist Svetlana Boym writes, “The stronger the rhetoric of continuity with the historical past and emphasis on traditional values, the more selectively the past is usually presented.”²¹⁵ For the South devastated by the Civil War, the Lost Cause created a certain kind of remembrance of the past that was acceptable to the adherents of white hegemony. Through its promotion by various pro-Confederate organizations via monuments and public education, this cultural framework shaped the collective memory of future generations. It had also, in the words of Robert J. Norrell, “promoted the sense of white southern distinctiveness in opposition to both the United States government and white southerners' ethnic enemies, African Americans.”²¹⁶ This sense of uniqueness in relation to this Southern memory influenced white Southern socio-political cultural climate, and eventually gave rise to the League of the South. As Fred Arthur Bailey writes,

Thus twentieth-century southern whites absorbed a veneration for the Confederate cause, an intense resistance to black civil rights, and a deferential spirit toward their "proper" leaders. Historical

²¹³ Hill, “League of the South's Statement on Southern White Nationalism.”

²¹⁴ Michael Hill, “The League of the South: Looking to the Future,” *League of the South*.

<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-league-of-the-south-looking-to-the-future/>> October 2, 2021.

²¹⁵ Svetlana Boym, From “Nostalgia and Its Discontents,” *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Oxford University Press: New York, 2011): 454.

²¹⁶ Robert J. Norrell, *The House I Live In: Race in the American Century* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2005). Google Books

<https://books.google.cz/books?id=UsPhBwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false> March 4, 2021.

truth, as defined and dictated by the Confederate societies, insured that southerners would retain cultural values detrimental to the progress of their own native land.²¹⁷

In their discourse, we may observe the League's veneration for the Confederate leaders projected by the defense of the monuments, employment of the characters in their texts, and protests against public education. In his articles for the League's members, Michael Hill frequently expresses his hopes to fulfill "the prayer of General Robert E. Lee when he asked that the South be given a name and place among the nations of the earth,"²¹⁸ wonders "what Lee or Jackson would have to say," and celebrates Lee and Jackson as "our confederate heroes"²¹⁹ and "honorable men and Christians."²²⁰ Accordingly, the League views the removal of Confederate monuments as exhibits of evils of the federal government and multiculturalism, and disagrees with the contemporary discussion on the Confederacy as opposed to their collective memory of heroes rightly seceding and wronged by Lincoln.

With the old textbooks promoting the Lost Cause's emphasis on the heroics of Confederate leaders removed from Southern curriculum and the public debate on the reinterpretation of Confederate symbols leading to an increasing number of Confederate monuments being removed, the League complains that "[Southern] schools and colleges have long lapsed from [the South's] control, teaching [their] young to despise their ancestors and themselves,"²²¹ and protests Critical Race Theory taught in public schools, warning their members to get their children "out of these propaganda factories called public schools."²²² In a

²¹⁷ Bailey, "The Textbooks of the 'Lost Cause': Censorship and the Creation of Southern State Histories," 533.

²¹⁸ Hill, "The League of the South: Looking to the Future."

²¹⁹ "The League and Theocracy," *League of the South*.

<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-league-and-theocracy/>> September 8, 2021.

²²⁰ Michael Hill, "Celebrating Lee and Jackson," *League of the South*, January 16, 2015

<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/celebrating-lee-and-jackson519/>> October 23, 2021.

²²¹ "The Southern Nation."

²²² Michael Hill, "Statement on Public Education," *League of the South*, October 4, 2021

<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/statement-on-public-education/>> October 23, 2021.

nostalgic article on the South of his childhood (the era of segregation), Michael Hill laments, “When we studied history in school, we studied our heroes. No apology was made for not being ‘inclusive’ and ‘multicultural.’”²²³

In more recent years, the public discourse of the white nation under attack has shifted from the issue of African American civil rights to the issue of immigration; in 1996, historian Clyde N. Wilson, one of the founding members of the League of the South, wrote that the increasing multiculturality of the United States will make “ethnic identities, including the southern identity, even sharper.”²²⁴ Dobratz and Shanks-Meile see white separatism as a response to the declining economic conditions and growing political alienation, which may include increasing levels of multicultural integration and interracial competition for employment, connected to loss in the standard of living of white Americans.²²⁵ As Diane Roberts writes, “Nationalism flourishes when societies feel economically or culturally insecure.”²²⁶

The League itself rejects the neo-Confederate label, and has sought to distance themselves from heritage organizations which they perceive as excessively past-oriented,²²⁷ and lacking the initiative “to actually carry forward the ideas and ideals of our Southern ancestors in this modern era.”²²⁸ Unlike other Lost Cause apologists, the League has also never denied the facts of slavery, neither emphasizing its “benefits” or claiming the institution would soon die out regardless of the war. In the eyes of the League, this gives the organization

²²³ Michael Hill, “Why My Heart’s in Dixie,” *League of the South*, August 10, 2021 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/why-my-hearts-in-dixie/>> November 4, 2021.

²²⁴ Clyde N. Wilson, “The Confederate Battle Flag: A Symbol of Southern Heritage and Identity,” *Southern Cultures*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter 1996): 271. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26235422>> October 5, 2021.

²²⁵ Dobratz, Shanks-Meile, 269-281.

²²⁶ Diane Roberts, “The Great-Granddaddy of White Nationalism,” *Southern Cultures, Left-Right Issue* (Vol. 25, no. 3: Fall 2019) <<https://www.southerncultures.org/article/the-great-granddaddy-of-white-nationalism/>> February 4, 2021.

²²⁷ “Past, Present, and Future.”

²²⁸ Michael Hill, “SCV Has Been Found Out...” *League of the South*, June 28, 2021. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/scv-has-been-found-out/>> October 23, 2021.

historical credibility.²²⁹ However, the League frequently acts to defend the Confederate heritage, and in line with the Lost Cause, forefronts the Southern right to secede to protect the superior white Southern ethnicity – “as it should be” – from Northern abolitionists.²³⁰ It also actively benefits from the activities of the neo-Confederate organizations who do adhere to the doctrine of defense of slavery. As the Southern Poverty Law Center asserts,

in their effort to gloss over the legacy of slavery in the South, these groups strengthen the appeal of Lost Cause mythology, opening the door for violent incidents spurred by the rhetoric of cynical individuals like Michael Hill [...] when the public prominence of those icons [Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and Alexander H. Stephens] is threatened.²³¹

In their defense of the Lost Cause, the League advocates white Southern nationalism and secession of the Southern states in order to protect their collective Southern memory of white hegemony, and their Southern Anglo-Celtic identity influenced by this narrative, to “make Davis, Lee, Jackson, and Forrest²³² proud.”²³³

2.4 League of the South and Southern White Nationalism in the Context of Global White Nationalism

Despite its Southern white nationalist focus, League of the South exhibits additional interest in global white hegemony. According to Kathleen Belew, white nationalism as of today is not a form of extreme patriotism to the United States, but instead has transformed

²²⁹ Hill, “A Plausible Lie: A Critique of ‘The South Was Right!’

²³⁰ Michael Hill, “If the South Was Right Then Why Are There Rainbow Confederates?” *League of the South*, August 13, 2014

<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/if-the-south-was-right-then-why-are-there-rainbow-confederates/>> November 3, 2021.

²³¹ Racial Division Along the Neo-Confederate Spectrum, *Southern Poverty Law Center*, March 2, 2017.

<<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/03/02/racial-division-along-neo-confederate-spectrum>> October 24, 2021.

²³² Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Confederate general perhaps better known as the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.

²³³ Hill, “SCV Has Been Found Out...”

from the KKK's "pure patriotism"²³⁴ into a violent transnational racial unity "that is going to overthrow the United States [and] unite white people across the globe."²³⁵ While separatist and South-centered, the League confirms this opinion in its "Statement on Southern/White Nationalism," where the League speaks of "our White cousins elsewhere" and puts forward the notion that through their campaign for Southern independence, they "are indirectly serving the cause of a larger White nationalism [...] to aid in the re-establishment of a White hegemony over all the lands we have inherited."²³⁶ According to the League, reclaiming the South will be the first step towards establishing white supremacy over North America and Europe.

In this remaking of the South into once again a "White Man's Land" with the aid of their "racial cousins,"²³⁷ other white nationalist organizations across the globe such as the South African Suidlanders,²³⁸ organizations the League simultaneously establishes itself as the antipole to the rest of the United States, i.e. the "other" in ideological resistance towards the federal dominance, and as the restorative power of the original equilibrium of white hegemony in what it perceives as the land of their Anglo-Celtic ancestors, lost to destructive external powers of the federal government and other ethnicities and races. This framework of a mythical past encompasses the narratives of the South as the land of Anglo-Celtic Christian heritage, the South as the "true America" intended by the Founding Fathers, and the South as the homeland of the Lost Cause, destroyed by the tyranny of the "American Empire." Simultaneously, the League positions itself among other white nationalist groups towards a revival of a collective memory of global white hegemony.

²³⁴ *Principles and Purposes of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Outlined by an Exalted Cyclos of the Order*.

²³⁵ Belew.

²³⁶ Hill, "League of the South's Statement on Southern White Nationalism."

²³⁷ Hill, "League of the South's Statement on Southern White Nationalism."

²³⁸ Michael Hill, "League Rep Meets with Suidlanders in South Africa," *League of the South*, January 3, 2019. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/league-rep-meets-with-suidlanders-in-south-africa/>> November 4, 2021.

In order achieve this goal, the League calls for resistance primarily against the “totalitarians” who allow “the economic, racial, ethnic, and cultural balance of the US or any other White country” to be damaged by letting in “thousands upon thousands of Muslims, Latinos, negroes, and other non-Western peoples”²³⁹ to lands that are, according to the League, historically rightly white. The League's definition of the Southern nation as “descendants of European, Christian peoples who settled the Southern region of North America [...] people bound together by blood and soil”²⁴⁰ echoes the nationalist-agrarianist slogan of “blut and boden” adopted by the Nazi propaganda. This slogan states that only racially pure people are entitled to the land to which they are bound by their ethnic heritage.

“Blut and boden” is now a popular slogan of white nationalists in the United States, shouted at the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally among other quotes such as “Jews will not replace us” and “White lives matter.” The League of the South partook in organizing numerous white nationalist rallies in the summer of 2017, known as “the Summer of Hate” among the white power movement,²⁴¹ including the Unite the Right rally. The League participated and in fact led the way,²⁴² along with other white nationalist and supremacist groups including the Ku Klux Klan and the Nationalist Front, a coalition of alt-right and white supremacist organizations, of which the League was part between 2017 and 2018. Though no longer associated with the Nationalist Front, the League has as recently as in July 2021 posted an article in defense of “White culture and civilization,”²⁴³ indicating its continuing interest in global white hegemony.

²³⁹ Michael Hill, “For Kith and Kin,” *League of the South*, July 9, 2021.
<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/for-kith-and-kin-2/>> October 23, 2021.

²⁴⁰ “Our Survival as People.”

²⁴¹ “League of the South secedes from the Nationalist Front,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, August 22, 2018.
<<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/08/22/league-south-secedes-nationalist-front>> October 23, 2021.

²⁴² Michael Hill, “League of the South Statement on Charlottesville,” *League of the South*, August 23, 2017.
<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/league-of-the-south-statement-on-charlottesville/>> October 16, 2021.

²⁴³ Michael Hill, “Some Thoughts on Our Developing Situation,” *League of the South*, July 2, 2021.
<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/some-thoughts-on-our-developing-situation/>> October 4, 2021.

This chapter has focused on the appearance of the Lost Cause narratives in the written discourse of the League of the South. The next chapter will focus on the promotion of collective memory of the League through its iconography.

3. Symbolism of Southern White Nationalism: Iconography of The League of the South

This chapter explores the vital importance of Confederate symbolism and the mythology of the Lost Cause to white Southern nationalism via the use of iconography by the League of the South. The first subchapter provides a contextual analysis of Confederate flag politics, and provides an overview of their historical relevance to white Southern nationalism through the employment of primarily the battle flag by various Southern interest groups following the Civil War, while the second subchapter analyses the contemporary associations of flag culture and Confederate heritage with aspects of white Southern nationalism in a case study of the League of the South, and examines the League's approach to the flag politics through an analysis of their iconography.

According to anthropologist Robert Shanafelt, flags serve as “symbols of group solidarity that achieve force through ritual processes;” by activating key emotional dispositions related to both social bonding of a group and the pursuit of dominance, they evoke a sense of collective identity channeled by a shared cause,²⁴⁴ and represent “a meeting between self and collective interest”²⁴⁵ on the basis of power and symbolic association with kin. The display of the flag, which may represent a nation, state, or a specific society, evokes feelings of loyalty and patriotism whose intensity differs according to the level of attachment to that group. As has been established previously in this thesis, the attachment to the mythology of the Lost Cause reaches a high level of intensity to the proponents of neo-Confederates and white Southern nationalists. Furthermore, historian John M. Coski's

²⁴⁴ Robert Shanafelt, “The Nature of Flag Power: How Flags Entail Dominance, Subordination, and Social Solidarity,” *Politics and the Life Sciences*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (September 2008): 13. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40072953>> October 5, 2021.

²⁴⁵ Shanafelt, 22.

relativist approach claims that “a symbol’s use determines its meanings and affects the way people perceive it,”²⁴⁶ which helps to understand how the public perception of the Confederate battle flag, the most prominent image of the Confederate iconography, manages to simultaneously hold a number of different cultural associations according to its use by various interest groups, and how it has come to be used by the League of the South.

This chapter will discuss the League of the South's relationship with iconography on the example of flags relevant to the history of the Lost Cause and present-day white Southern nationalism: predominantly the Confederate battle flag (the Southern Cross) as a representative of the former Southern nation as well as a symbols of ideals associated with it through the Lost Cause narrative, the U.S. federal flag (Stars and Stripes) as a representative physical article of federal tyranny as perceived by the Southern white nationalists, and the League of the South's unique flag, the Black Cross, as an emblem of the group identity of the Southern white Anglo-Saxon nationalist organization.²⁴⁷

3.1 Contextual Analysis of the Politics of the Confederate Battle Flag

The Confederate States of America trace their iconographic origins to the Bonnie Blue Flag, a single white star on a dark blue field, adopted from the original states of West Florida, the Republic of Texas, and Mississippi. Known across the South “as *the* secession flag,”²⁴⁸ it was the unofficial flag flown by the rebel battalions which fired at Fort Sumter in April 1861. Along with a marching song of the same name, it forms a distinct piece of Confederate culture, though as the Civil War began, the Confederacy soon decided to replace the Bonnie Blue Flag with a new national flag, the Stars and Bars, which took its design from the Stars

²⁴⁶ John M. Coski, *The Confederate Battle Flag: America's Most Embattled Emblem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005): viii.

²⁴⁷ The League's relationship to heritage, white Southern nationalist identity, and the collective memory of the Lost Cause are discussed in Chapter Two: The League of the South as a Case Study of White Southern Nationalism.

²⁴⁸ Glenn Dedmondt, *The Flags of Civil War Arkansas* (Pelican Publishing Company: Gretna, 2009): 12.

and Stripes of the Union.²⁴⁹ Unwilling to abandon the legacy of the American Revolution with which the Confederacy strongly identified,²⁵⁰ the Confederacy composed its original national flag of three bars of white and red, with each star in the circle on a blue background symbolizing one seceding state – like the original thirteen colonies had once abandoned the British tyranny, so had now the eleven contemporary Southern states abandoned the USA in pursuit of their own goals.²⁵¹ The Confederate states were no longer a part of the Union, but the similarity of the Confederate flag to the original flag represented their Southern identity as rooted in the American Revolution.

Due to this similarity between the Union flag and the Confederate flag which led to confusion on the battlefield, the secession flag was soon replaced with the Southern Cross, a blue St. Andrew saltire with thirteen white stars on a red banner. In 1863, the battle flag became incorporated into the second national flag in the form of the Stainless Banner, the battle flag on a white field, dubbed “the white man's flag”²⁵² and becoming not only a symbol of the (not yet Lost) Cause's purity, but also of the racial purity of white supremacy. The Stainless Banner was produced just in time to be placed over the coffin of Stonewall Jackson, a Confederate general and an icon of the Lost Cause. By 1865, as the Confederacy was suffering heavy losses yet still remained hopeful in its final victory, the flag was reworked into the Blood-Stained Banner, where a red bar was incorporated into the white field in order to prevent mistaking the battle flag for a flag of truce.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Coski, 3.

²⁵⁰ As described in Chapter One: The Lost Cause and the Historical Background of Southern White Nationalism.

²⁵¹ Guy Davenport, “The Confederate Battle Flag,” *Callaloo*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Winter, 2001): 52. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3300451>> October 5, 2021.

²⁵² “Daily morning news. (Savannah, Ga.) 1850-1864, April 28, 1863,” *Georgia Historic Newspapers*, Digital Library of Georgia. <<https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn82015886/1863-04-28/ed-1/seq-2/>> November 8, 2021.

²⁵³ Coski, 17-18.

During the war, the battle flag was used only in engagement and predominantly as a symbol of regimental designation,²⁵⁴ and would be frequently exchanged for local or state banners, especially in the Deep South and the Midwest. Only by the era of Reconstruction would it become a prominent symbol of the Lost Cause, segregation, Jim Crow, and white Southern resistance to the federal government, thus “creating a new meaning to ‘Southern’ heritage.”²⁵⁵ According to Guy Davenport, there are currently two ways of perceiving the Confederate battle flag: one, a “captured flag, a defeated flag, a flag that belongs to history,” and two, an emblem of persevering racism,²⁵⁶ championed by white nationalists through the association of their activities with the flag. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, today, “Confederate monuments and symbols legitimize racial hierarchy and white supremacist ideology.”²⁵⁷

In 1866, the Ku Klux Klan adopted the battle flag for use during lynchings and rituals, tying the antebellum supremacist symbolism of the flag with post-war white nationalism in the South as well as with resistance to the federal government's Reconstruction efforts. Simultaneously, in 1868 and 1895 respectively, the states of Florida and Alabama adopted a red St. Andrew saltire on white background.²⁵⁸ These flags, modeled on the Confederate design, were adopted after the fall of the Confederacy in, as Thornton asserts, a reminder that white supremacy and the Lost Cause were “mutually dependent, indeed definitive, elements of southern life.”²⁵⁹ These flags continue to be used by the two states.

²⁵⁴ Cameron D. Lippard, “Heritage or Hate?” *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Winter 2017): 67. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48561577>> October 5, 2021.

²⁵⁵ Lippard, 68-69.

²⁵⁶ Davenport, 51.

²⁵⁷ “Losing the ‘Lost Cause’: SPLC Launches Billboard Campaign to Educate Communities on False Narrative Behind Confederate History Month,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, May 12, 2021. <<https://www.splcenter.org/news/2021/05/14/losing-lost-cause-splc-launches-billboard-campaign-educate-communities-false-narrative>> October 30, 2021.

²⁵⁸ Florida's flag includes a state seal in the middle.

²⁵⁹ Thornton, 239.

Neo-Confederate organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy would encourage the use of the battle flag during ceremonies celebrating the collective memory of the Confederacy; by the early 20th century, it became a traditional practice for the mourners of the former Southern states to lay small battle flags by the headstones of their Confederate heroes.²⁶⁰ By associating the fallen Southern soldiers with martyrdom and the battle flag with their sacrifice, the heritage group turned the Southern Cross into a physical representation of the Lost Cause, and therefore a relic of a venerated bygone time. According to Maurantonio, the Confederate relics are used to extract a collective memory of the antebellum South from its history of white supremacy;²⁶¹ thus, this pure and mythologized Confederacy must be defended from historical revisionism as a cultural heritage of the South, devoid of any additional meanings. Simultaneously however, the battle flag's white supremacist charge continued to persist.

During the era of Jim Crow and segregation, the Confederate battle flag served as a form of ideological resistance to the efforts of the Civil Rights movement, both racial and political. The Dixiecrats, a pro-segregation Southern faction of the Democrats, adopted the Southern Cross as a party flag in 1948 in protest against civil rights, which increased its popularity in the public spaces. This popularity has only grown through its commercialization in popular culture in the so-called “flag fad,” becoming a normalized sign of Southerness and general rebellion, a logo of the “redneck culture,” and even gaining popularity among Southern university students as a symbol of “traditions of Southern culture which are good

²⁶⁰ Coski, 52.

²⁶¹ Maurantonio, 44-66.

and noble in the hearts of all men.”²⁶² Meanwhile, the Southern governments erected the flag as a symbol of continued resistance to civil rights.

Following the court-ordered desegregation decided in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1957, Georgia added the Confederate battle flag to its state flag, along with the legislative proposal of declaring the 14th and 15th Amendment “null, void, and of no effect.”²⁶³ In a clear signal of its racial meaning of white hegemony, the state’s use of the flag symbolized its support of segregation. The supporters of the decision would later claim that the change was made in anticipation of the Civil War centennial.²⁶⁴ Like the Lost Cause however, this was a retrospective argument used to defend a problematic past. Similarly, the governor of South Carolina ordered the battle flag to fly over the state capitol in 1961.

As Coski writes, “as the [battle] flag’s ideological message was reinvigorated, other uses completely diluted or ignored that message.”²⁶⁵ Having lost its original military meaning,²⁶⁶ the battle flag has become infused with the collective memory of the white South, i.e. with white Southern nationalism as defined by the loss of the Confederacy. By the 1990s, objections to the public display of the battle flag and its use by state governments were growing,²⁶⁷ and organizations such as the League of the South began their defense of the Confederate battle flag as a vital part of Southern cultural heritage against the “cultural genocide” and erasure of Southern history. Today, flags of the Confederacy are the “artifacts

²⁶² University of Mississippi student senate resolution, April 1983; Coski, “The Confederate Battle Flag in American History and Culture,” *Southern Cultures*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter 1996): 215. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26235411>> October 5, 2021.

²⁶³ “Senate Resolution 39, Act 45, 1957,” *Virtual Vault*, Georgia Archives: University of Georgia. <<https://vault.georgiaarchives.org/digital/collection/adhoc/id/9094>> November 9, 2021.

²⁶⁴ Alexander J. Azarian, Eden Fesshazion, “The State Flag of Georgia: The 1956 Change In Its Historical Context,” *The State Senate: Senate Research Office* (August 2000): 21. Online. <<https://web.archive.org/web/20141204200939/http://www.senate.ga.gov/sro/Documents/StudyCommRpts/00StateFlag.pdf>> November 9, 2021.

²⁶⁵ Coski, “The Confederate Battle Flag in American History and Culture,” 196.

²⁶⁶ Keeping in mind that the military of the Confederacy defended slavery.

²⁶⁷ Lippard, 72

of Post-Reconstruction Confederate revivals;”²⁶⁸ in forging a specific kind of remembrance of the Confederacy through the dispersion of the myth of the Lost Cause, white Southern nationalists created an identity for the white Southerners as the descendants of the Confederate heroes and heirs to white hegemony in the South.

Generating polarized opinions since the end of the Civil War, the national debate on the meaning of the Confederate symbolism intensified when white supremacist Dylann Roof, with the intent to start a race war, murdered nine African Americans in a Charleston church, South Carolina on June 17, 2015.²⁶⁹ When pictures of Roof, holding the Confederate battle flag, were discovered along with a white supremacist manifesto the shooter had authored on his own website,²⁷⁰ large American retailers such as Walmart and Amazon stopped selling the Southern Cross despite the sales of them skyrocketing, citing the fear of being “associated with racism.”²⁷¹ This example of “historical revisionism” would only serve to reinvigorate the white Southern nationalist attempts to retain the Confederate battle flag in the public spaces.

Simultaneously also began the gradual effort to remove the Southern Cross from buildings belonging to local governments. Having flown over the State House of South Carolina since 1961, the battle flag was ordered removed. Former Governor Nikki Haley, who had signed the bill, later called the flag a symbol of “service, sacrifice and heritage” that had been hijacked by Roof.²⁷² Simultaneously confirming its white supremacist ideology and

²⁶⁸ Thornton, 237.

²⁶⁹ Katie Rogers, “Charleston Shooting Reignites Debate About Confederate Flag,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 2015

<<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/20/us/charleston-shooting-reignites-debate-about-confederate-flag.html>> January 30, 2021.

²⁷⁰ Since deleted.

²⁷¹ Mallory Schlossberg, “The Real Reasons So Many Retail Brands Are Taking the Confederate Flags Off Shelves,” *Business Insider*, June 28, 2015

<<https://www.businessinsider.com/why-retailers-are-taking-confederate-flags-off-the-shelves-2015-6>> November 9, 2021.

²⁷² Colby Itkowitz, “Nikki Haley: Mass Murderer Dylann Roof ‘Hijacked’ Meaning of Confederate Flag,” *Washington Post*, December 6, 2019

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/nikki-haley-mass-murderer-dylann-roof-hijacked-meaning-of-confederate-flag/2019/12/06/f4113e0e-1854-11ea-9110-3b34ce1d92b1_story.html> November 2, 2021.

denying it, Haley thus epitomized the conflicting perceptions of the battle flag in the American society, while also defending it as an important element of Southern cultural heritage. This position is shared widely even apart from white nationalist organizations; even the *International Flag Book* identifies the Confederate battle flag simply as the “Flag of the South,”²⁷³ seemingly as if the region (by whatever criteria defined) was a nation identical to the Confederacy. The League of the South has picked up on all of these meanings.

3.2 The League of the South's Flag Culture

To both its proponents and adversaries, the battle flag leads “a double life both as a nostalgic symbol and a deeply evocative banner of racism,”²⁷⁴ as worded by journalist Erin Blakemore. Heritage groups highlight the battle flag's link to the ideals of the Lost Cause mythology, i.e. their collective memory of the heroism of their Confederate heroes, and the freedom they laid their lives and limbs for. Meanwhile, the anti-flag activists see the Southern Cross's innate defense of slavery and the gradual link with more general racism and white nationalism it had gained following the Civil War till present. As William M. Reynolds writes, “Confederate symbols have two contexts: the period of the Confederacy itself and the time in which these symbols were readopted.”²⁷⁵

The League of the South sees both, and praises the Confederacy for not only the pursuit of Southern freedom, but also for its affirmations of natural white supremacy and Christian traditionalism as the correct racial and social order in the South,²⁷⁶ while simultaneously endorsing the narrative of the Lost Cause through relativization of “the

²⁷³ Christian Fogd Pedersen, *The International Flag Book In Color* (Blandford Press: London, 1971): 202.

²⁷⁴ Erin Blakemore, “How the Confederate Battle Flag Became an Enduring Symbol of Racism,” *National Geographic*, January 12, 2021

<<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/how-confederate-battle-flag-became-symbol-racism>> October 23, 2021.

²⁷⁵ Reynolds, 235.

²⁷⁶ Hill, “If the South Was Right Then Why Are There Rainbow Confederates?”

alleged cruelty of master to slaves.”²⁷⁷ The League’s community, the “kith and kin”²⁷⁸ of blood, land, and shared traditions, the Southern whites of Anglo-Saxon ancestry, are symbolized by the Confederate battle flag, an emblem of both Southern white nationhood, cultural heritage, and resistance to the federal government.²⁷⁹

Accordingly, the League sees the debate on the removal of the Confederate battle flag through the lens of not only the Lost Cause, but also of white nationalism defending the Southern cultural heritage through the fight for a Southern white hegemony. In response to the 2015 shooting in Charleston, the League of the South called the renewed debate on the symbolism of the battle flag and attempts at historical revisionism, “the summer’s cultural genocide campaign against the South,”²⁸⁰ thus connecting the flag with their white Southern ethnic identification.²⁸¹ The organization also stated their support of Kyle Rogers, the webmaster and former leader of the South Carolina chapter of the white supremacist Council of Conservative Citizens, which according to Roof, had played a role in his radicalization into white nationalism.²⁸²

Rogers, like the League, developed his rhetoric from attempts at the “preservation of European heritage” into an openly radicalized, racist language.²⁸³ He is also the owner of the Patriotic Flags, an online flag and apparel store,²⁸⁴ which has been steadily printing the

²⁷⁷ Michael Hill, “From our Archives: The Demonization of the South (2008),” *League of the South*, July 9, 2021 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/from-our-archives-14/>> November 12, 2021.

²⁷⁸ Hill, “For Kith and Kin.”

²⁷⁹ Michael Hill, “SBC Abandons Confederate Battle Flag,” *League of the South*, June 14, 2016 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/sbc-abandons-confederate-battle-flag/>> November 11, 2021.

²⁸⁰ Michael Hill, “A Few Notes on an American Race War (re-posted),” *League of the South*, March 13, 2016 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/a-few-notes-on-an-american-race-war-re-posted/>> November 4, 2021. In the same article, the League proceeded to give a detailed account of the American race war as against “negroes” before emphasizing that “we Southern nationalists want to live in peace with all men.”

²⁸¹ As discussed in Chapter 2.

²⁸² “Kyle Rogers,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*.

<<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/kyle-rogers>> November 10, 2021.; “Full Text Of Charleston Suspect Dylann Roof’s Apparent Manifesto,” *Talking Points Memo*, June 20, 2015 <<https://talkingpointsmemo.com/muckraker/dylann-roof-manifesto-full-text>> November 10, 2021.

²⁸³ “Kyle Rogers.”

²⁸⁴ *Patriotic Flags*. <<https://www.patriotic-flags.com>> November 20, 2021.

League of the South's merchandise. On June 21, 2015, four days after the Charleston shooting, the League released a statement in defense of their "friend and compatriot," expressing fury at the "repulsive ideological persecution" behind the attempt to blame "Mr. Rogers, the [Council of Confederate Citizens], the Confederate battle flag, Southern culture, or the Easter Bunny for causing this murder."²⁸⁵ Next to the defense, the League posted a picture of the Southern Cross.

By uniting the battle flag with the League's defense of an ally, the League places itself, the flag, and tight kinship under the tribal umbrella of Southern culture, while simultaneously mocking the idea of that culture being responsible for Roof's actions through the usage of a folkloric symbol of Easter as a potential suspect. In the League's usage, the Confederate battle flag thus serves to unite all Southern white nationalists regardless of their associated organization. As has been established in the second chapter, the League self-portrays as a reactionary white Southern ethnicity standing against the aggressive external federal forces which seek to destroy that ethnicity's historical and cultural heritage. This places the organization in a victimized position, which justifies its actions and goals on the basis of self-defense. Extending the threat from Confederate symbols through Constitutional rights of free speech to bare survival, the League portrays the removal of flags and monuments as a stepping stone to governmental tyranny:

Your enemy will not stop with the stone of monuments and the fabric of flags. Nor with silencing your free speech to defend yourself. Nor with simply leaving you alone to live your lives as you see fit, as your ancestors did. No, they come after you, flesh, blood, and bone.²⁸⁶

As the League of the South perceives white Southerners (regardless of association) to be at war with the United States, protecting their people from an ethnic and cultural genocide,

²⁸⁵ Michael Hill, "We Support Kyle Rogers," *The League of the South*, June 21, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/we-support-kyle-rogers/>> November 10, 2021.

²⁸⁶ Hill, "Some Thoughts on Our Developing Situation."

it considers the defense of Southern symbols from extinction, including the Confederate battle flag, a vital task of the South. The League of the South had stated this position early on after its founding in 1994, when in 1995, a white teenager Michael Westerman was murdered by two black teenagers allegedly for flying the battle flag from his car. During the subsequent memorial ceremony, Westerman was martyred by white nationalists as the victim of a racial conflict,²⁸⁷ and Michael Hill of what then was still called the Southern League, declared it an “open season” on innocent people defying the government.²⁸⁸ Here, the opposition to the federal government was the public display of the Southern Cross on private property. That public display of the flag is a source of nostalgic feelings for the time of white Southern hegemony, a time when “the fathers and grandfathers of today’s Southerners flew those flags as a matter of fact [...] they controlled the South and outsiders could go to hell if they didn’t like it.”²⁸⁹ To the League, the battle flag is historically associated with freedom and white hegemony.

For over two decades later, the League has been instructing its followers to rise against the federal government and defend the white Southern ethnicity, while deploying the battle flag to underscore the message of rebellion and the collective memory of the Southern cultural heritage. The Southern Cross headlines articles that call for “stronger men (and women) [...] working for a future in which the true South is once again White Man’s Land,”²⁹⁰ representing the League’s interest in white hegemony in the South as promoted by white Southern nationalism. During that time until the present, the flag has been deployed by the League in

²⁸⁷ Coski, 184-185.

²⁸⁸ Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic* (Vintage Books: New York, 1999): 112.

²⁸⁹ Michael Hill, “No Fear,” *League of the South*, July 14, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/no-fear-961/>> November 4, 2021.

²⁹⁰ “A Lesson Learned: Modern ‘Conservatism,’” *League of the South*, January 12, 2017 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/a-lesson-learned-modern-conservatism/>> November 4, 2021.

numerous usages associated with their stance on racial and ethnic politics, religion, and the political culture of the United States versus the white South.

The battle flag illustrates the announcement of the formation of the League's paramilitary wing, the Southern Defense Force,²⁹¹ providing the association between the Confederacy and the League; identically to the myth of the Lost Cause's claim of Northern aggression against the South from which the Confederacy was forced defend itself via secession, the League forms its own "army" to defend the Southern people and help them secede from the United States, by "deadly force" is necessary.²⁹² The Southern Cross also flies during all of the League's public actions: flag parades,²⁹³ white power rallies,²⁹⁴ Confederate memorial rallies,²⁹⁵ secession rallies,²⁹⁶ and demonstrations protesting migration.²⁹⁷ It celebrates the birthday of Confederate figures,²⁹⁸ like the "General Robert E. Lee, the epitome of the Southern gentleman-warrior,"²⁹⁹ and exalts own members protecting the flag as equivalent to the Confederate standard bearers.³⁰⁰

The continuous use of the battle flag serves the double purpose of uniting the League of the South with the nationalist idea of the white Southern cultural heritage, as well as

²⁹¹ Hill, "Southern Defense Force Formed."

²⁹² Michael Hill, "An 'Outlaw' Flag in Defiance of Cultural Genocide," *League of the South*, June 13, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/an-outlaw-flag-in-defiance-of-cultural-genocide/>> November 10, 2021.

²⁹³ Andrew Tracey, "League Member Attends Battle Flag Parade in Georgia," *League of the South*, July 11, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/league-member-attends-battle-flag-parade-in-georgia/>> November 4, 2021;

Andrew Tracey, "Rally for the State Flag in Mississippi," *League of the South*, October 16, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/rally-for-the-state-flag-in-mississippi/>> November 4, 2021; Michael Hill, "Flag Rally in Montgomery," *League of the South*, June 27, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/flag-rally-in-montgomery/>> November 4, 2021.

²⁹⁴ Hill, "League of the South Statement on Charlottesville."

²⁹⁵ Andrew Tracey, "League Speaks at Confederate Memorial Rally in Birmingham," *League of the South*, July 19, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/league-speaks-at-confederate-memorial-rally-in-birmingham/>> November 4, 2021.

²⁹⁶ Andrew Tracey, "Secession Rally Held in Okeechobee," *League of the South*, August 14, 2016 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/secession-rally-held-in-okeechobee/>> November 4, 2021.

²⁹⁷ Andrew Tracey, "Arkansas LS Rallies Against Immigration," *League of the South*, August 30, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/arkansas-ls-rallies-against-immigration/>> November 4, 2021.

²⁹⁸ Hill, "Celebrating Lee and Jackson."

²⁹⁹ Hill, "If the South Was Right Then Why Are There Rainbow Confederates?"

³⁰⁰ Michael Hill, "Harold Crews Injury Photo," *League of the South*, October 11, 2017 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/harold-crews-injury-photo/>> November 4, 2021.

casting the organization as the forerunners of a modern Southern nation while anchoring its principles in the mythical origin story of the Founding Fathers and the Lost Cause. Thus, the League exists firmly in the present, but may draw upon its historical roots to establish authenticity to the white Southern heritage based on Confederacy: resistance to authority.³⁰¹ The League states, “If we Southerners have to become outlaws to protect and defend our cultural inheritance, it won’t be the first time;”³⁰² by thus connecting the League to both the glorified past (first secession) and the coveted future (second secession), the League positions itself on the level of heroic Confederate rebels according to the Lost Cause narrative, and so gives legitimacy to their secessionist politics in resistance to the federal government of the United States.

This “illegal” resistance stems from the League’s self-perception of white Southerners as a marginalized group endangered both demographically by the existence of other ethnicities in the South, and culturally by the removal of the battle flag from public spaces. According to activist and scholar Mab Segrest, in the conversations on Southern rights, “a sense of loss of rights, of status, prevails [as] the glue of white nationalism;”³⁰³ feeling victimized by the system, the white Southern nationalists rebel. Even a mere act of buying, owning, and flying the battle flag is perceived as resistance by the League. Intended as “dominance display in the face of a challenger,” civilian flag usage increases dramatically during times of war, or in the mere presence of strong opposition to a shared group purpose, according to Shanafelt.³⁰⁴ Following the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, small retailers who by 2017 still sold the Confederate battle flag, reported a dramatic surge in their

³⁰¹ Michael Hill, “The ‘Erasing Hate’ Campaign,” *League of the South*, August 10, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-erasing-hate-campaign/>> November 11, 2021.

³⁰² Hill, “An ‘Outlaw’ Flag in Defiance of Cultural Genocide.”

³⁰³ Segrest, 29.

³⁰⁴ Shanafelt, 19.

sales.³⁰⁵ The Southern Cross is a battle flag; white Southern nationalists like the League of the South will fly it to battle the federal government. Perceiving themselves at war, they are ready to fight and die for their Lost Cause.

In the eyes of the League, the Confederate battle flag serves as an antithesis to the federal flag of the United States. It is a symbol of resistance to “centralized tyranny and the greed, materialism, and decadence of the American Empire,”³⁰⁶ correspondingly represented by the Stars and Stripes, as well as of a good, Christian society. In its position paper on the federal flag, the League criticizes the “illegitimate” expansion of governmental power following the end of the Civil War, arguing it to be in conflict with the original agreement of the Founding Fathers about the limited powers of the U.S. federal government, and the federal flag to be a symbol of this centralization and the resulting “endless wars, open borders, the homosexual agenda, and abortion on demand [...] activist judges, affirmative action and political correctness”³⁰⁷ – things either conflicting with the League’s religious beliefs, or perceived as threats to the white Southern ethnicity and way of life.

The League proceeds to comment on the position and usage of the Stars and Stripes according to the U.S. Flag Code. According to Shanafelt, a flag can act as an organic symbol “to trigger a mindset of communal sharing, authority ranking, or both, depending on the social and topographic context.”³⁰⁸ Historian Robert E. Bonner adds that, “The profound martial strain in America’s reverence for their flags remains readily visible in the present-day United States.”³⁰⁹ In response, the League produces reverence for the iconography of the white

³⁰⁵ Chris Kenning, “Confederate Battle Flag Sales Boom After Charlottesville Clash,” *Reuters*, August 29, 2017 <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-protests-memorabilia/confederate-battle-flag-sales-boom-after-charlotteville-clash-idUSKCN1B926W>> November 2, 2021.

³⁰⁶ Hill, “The ‘Erasing Hate’ Campaign.”

³⁰⁷ “The Federal Flag,” *League of the South*, <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-federal-flag/>> September 7, 2021

³⁰⁸ Shanafelt, 20.

³⁰⁹ Robert E. Bonner, “Flag Culture and the Consolidation of Confederate Nationalism,” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (May, 2002): 295. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3069934>> October 5, 2021.

Southern community as opposed to the federal union, while simultaneously rallying against the authority imposed by the symbolic dominance of the Stars and Stripes.

The League criticizes the federal flag directive for ordering the Stars and Stripes to always fly at the peak above all other flags displays, in the “position of honor,”³¹⁰ for symbolically eclipsing the rights of individual states, claiming, “The servant has, without question, become the Master,”³¹¹ and in another article, posts a picture depicting a (presumably Southern) man as a prisoner of the federal flag.³¹² By thus uniting the topographic meaning of the flag with claiming for themselves the legacy of the Founding Fathers, the League can rail against the federal government from the position of true heirs of the Revolution. However, despite such claims, the South Carolina chapter of the League has posted a photo where the Southern Cross flag flies distinctly above the Confederate South Carolina flag,³¹³ signalizing that this approach only applies to the federal government, not the nationalist feelings of League chapters. Even more, the top position of the battle flag signals the primary importance of the Lost Cause to the League.

In response to the federal flag, the League has in the past employed the Gadsden flag, a rattlesnake on a yellow field over the words “Dont [sic] tread on me,” during protests against migration.³¹⁴ Originally used by the rebelling colonies during the American Revolution as a symbol of independence and resistance to tyranny, the flag has since been adopted by libertarians, gun rights supporters, and the Tea Party in support of minimal

³¹⁰ United States, Office of the Law Registration Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives. “4 U.S.C Ch.1: The Flag,” <<https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title4/chapter1&edition=prelim>> November 10, 2021.

³¹¹ “The Federal Flag.”

³¹² Michael Hill, “Celebrating On the Fourth Day of July, AD 2015,” *League of the South*, July 4, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/celebrating-on-the-fourth-day-of-july-ad-2015/>> November 13, 2021.

³¹³ “The South Carolina League of the South,” *League of the South*.

<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-south-carolina-league-of-the-south/>> November 4, 2021.

³¹⁴ “Photos,” *League of the South*. <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/photos/>> September 6, 2021.

government and opposition to its “overreach.”³¹⁵ Flying the snake along with the Confederate battle flag and the Black Cross of the League, the League sends a clear message of anti-government sentiments.

The usage of iconography of rebellion by the League of the South addresses the white Southern nationalists through their connection to historical instances of resistance of the American Revolution and the Civil War. Based on the cross of St. Andrew's, whose sainthood stems from his refusal to be equal to Jesus at his crucifixion and therefore his resistance to Roman hegemony, the Confederate battle flag symbolizes Christianity and resistance against federal tyranny. Such conceptualization is particularly potent for the neo-secessionist and Christian-oriented League of the South,³¹⁶ to the point of adopting their own flag based on the same concept: the League channels their resistance and religion through the Black Cross, a black saltire on a white field. There is further symbolism to the flag. According to the League, the flag “symbolizes the historic South by the St. Andrews Cross design, our race [elsewhere “our Folk and purity”]³¹⁷] by the white background, and no surrender or quarter by the black cross.”³¹⁸ The flag is therefore both a symbol of resistance to the federal government and an identifier of the League's ethnicity and values.

It is also a tool to differentiate the League from other white power, heritage, neo-Confederate, and nationalist organizations. According to the League, the flag was adopted for the purpose of easy identification of the group as “a hard-core [sic] Southern

³¹⁵ Rob Walker, “The Shifting Symbolism of the Gadsden Flag,” *The New Yorker*, October 2, 2016 <<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-shifting-symbolism-of-the-gadsden-flag>> November 11, 2021.

³¹⁶ Jansson, 210.

³¹⁷ Michael Hill, “The Symbolism of the Black Cross of Southern Nationalism,” *League of the South*, July 11, 2014 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-black-cross-of-southern-nationalism/>> October 28, 2021

³¹⁸ Michael Hill, “From our Archives: A Flag for the League,” *League of the South*, June 25, 2021 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/from-our-archives-9/>> November 9, 2021.

Nationalist organization”³¹⁹ within the context of other similar organizations, therefore signalizing the League's desire for public recognition. As Michael Hill further wrote in the article,

“Using our historic flags—which we still love and cherish—meant that if League members were gathered in public flying the battle flag, the Bonnie Blue, third national [Confederate flag], etc. there was really no way for the public to tell if it were us, the SCV, the Confederate Society of America, or the KKK.”³²⁰

The use of the flag therefore defines the League by what it is as well as what it is not: it reproduces the collective identity of the League, demarcates their group against other groups on the basis of member identification with the flag, and signals the group goals on the basis of design symbolism. By simultaneously accepting the St. Andrews cross as a symbol of Confederate heritage but infusing the flag with a contemporary purpose of secession, the Black Cross is to the League a representation of a an ideal future as imagined by the organization: a white supremacist South purged of the federal government and diversity, with a conservative culture based on a return to traditional Christian values as established by the mythical Anglo-Saxon and Confederate ancestors, leading the way for white resistance in other parts of the world. Simultaneously, the diametrical opposition of black and white colors in the flag symbolize their racial politics of white Southerners seceding from the multicultural United States, and white supremacy both Southern and in general culture.

Since its first unveiling in 2013, the Black Cross has been flying at counter demonstrations to the “globalist anti-Southern agenda” of Marxists and leftists,³²¹ as a symbol of white Southern nationalism against the federal government, namely the League of the

³¹⁹ Michael Hill, “A Flag for the League,” *League of the South*, July 1, 2014
<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/a-flag-for-the-league/>> November 9, 2021.

³²⁰ Hill, “From our Archives: A Flag for the League.”

³²¹ Andrew Tracey, “Florida League Stands Against Communists in Miami,” *League of the South*, July 24, 2016
<<https://leagueofthesouth.com/florida-league-stands-against-communists-in-miami/>> November 4, 2021.

South. In representation of the League as a white nationalist organization looking for global allies, the flag appears in the company of other white nationalists: hands are shaken over the banner in partnership between the League and white nationalists across the globe such as the South African Suidlanders,³²² and the flag accompanies the League's announcement of a Russian section feature for "our Russian friends,"³²³ where a relationship was established during a 2014 anti-globalist meeting with Russian nationalists.³²⁴

Defending Southern cultural heritage, the Black Cross guarantees the "solemn promise" of the League to seek the destruction of those who had removed the Southern Cross from the Lee Chapel at Washington and Lee University,³²⁵ as well as of the "rats" campaigning for the destruction of Southern blood and culture.³²⁶ Members of the League pose with the flag next to the #SECEDE billboard,³²⁷ a promotional secessionist campaign financed by the League in 2014. Along with the Southern Cross, it flew at the Unite the Right rally in 2017,³²⁸ and headlines countless articles on the League's website.

Following the commercialization of the Southern Cross in the second half of the 20th century, the popular culture sold the battle flag as a part of Southern heritage. According to cultural studies expert William M. Reynolds, "Buying items of 'Southern heritage' mists over and relegates much of the history, guilt, and struggles of slavery and race relations in the

³²² Hill, "League Rep Meets with Suidlanders in South Africa;" Michael Hill, "The League of the South Takes its Southern Nationalist Message to Moscow," *League of the South*, December 13, 2014 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-league-of-the-south-takes-its-southern-nationalist-message-to-moscow/>> October 28, 2021

³²³ Michael Hill, "To Our Russian Friends," *League of the South*, July 17, 2018 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/to-our-russian-friends/>> November 12, 2021.

³²⁴ Hill, "The League of the South Takes Its Southern Nationalist Message to Moscow."

³²⁵ Michael Hill, "A Statement on the Situation at Washington and Lee University," *League of the South*, July 30, 2014 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/a-statement-on-the-situation-at-washington-and-lee-university/>> November 4, 2021.

³²⁶ Michael Hill, "A Message to the Rats..." *League of the South*, June 30, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/a-message-to-the-rats/>> November 4, 2021.

³²⁷ Michael Hill, "The Black Cross: The Flag of Southern Nationalism," *League of the South*, July 2, 2014 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/the-black-cross-the-flag-of-southern-nationalism/>> November 8, 2021.

³²⁸ Hill, "League of the South Statement on Charlottesville."

South to a culture of silence.”³²⁹ The same strategy has been adopted by the League of the South through the sale of its own merchandise as symbols of unity and pride: on their website, they sell Black Cross lapel pins, T-shirts, sweatshirts, hoodies, polos, and work jackets, as well as mugs and flag patches with LS flag logo, T-shirts with anti-government slogans, and state chapter-specific League mugs.³³⁰

The sale of the League's own merchandise serves double purpose: collecting funds for the organization activities, thus funding the League's means for demonstrations and other activities, and uniting the group through shared physical attributes. The Black Cross apparel is especially significant. The shared uniform establishes the League members as members of a community with a shared purpose. The clothes are commonly worn by League members at rallies, demonstrations, and social events.³³¹ In the context of the anti-government resistance rhetoric of the organization which claims to be a nation at war with the United States, the apparel might even serve as an unofficial battledress of the League of the South.

The Black Cross frequently flies along with the Southern Cross. This use of iconography underscores two major points: the League of the South's identification within the context of the Lost Cause, and its idea of resistance to the government. The League's flag identifies white Southern nationalists, the heirs and defendants of the Confederacy, but only within the League itself. While the League's flag symbolizes identification with Southern heritage and the willingness to defend it, the battle flag is the embodiment, to the League, of the actual Southern heritage. In order to emphasize the bond bestowed upon the flags by the League, the organization occasionally merges the flags into one, with each Cross split in half.

³²⁹ William M. Reynolds, “The Southern Mist: The Shaping of American Culture and Politics,” *Counterpoints* Vol. 412 (2013): 21. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42981811>> September 7, 2021.

³³⁰ Michael Hill, “LS Black Cross SN Flag Lapel Pins Are Ready to Order!” *League of the South*, March 23, 2017 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/ls-black-cross-sn-flag-lapel-pins-are-ready-to-order/>> November 6, 2021.

³³¹ “Photos.”

This melding of “two flags, one nation,”³³² symbolizes unity of the South against the federal government and Southern cultural demolition.³³³ As the League of the South states, “May the two banners wave proudly together as a sign of Southern resistance!”³³⁴ To fly the Black Cross states the intention; to fly the Southern Cross is the purpose.

³³² Michael Hill, “What’s Wrong with a ‘Whiter America?’” *League of the South*, February 22, 2017 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/whats-wrong-with-a-whiter-america/>> November 3, 2021; Michael Hill, “Working with Our Nationalist Allies,” *League of the South*, May 15, 2017 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/working-with-our-nationalist-allies/>> November 6, 2021.

³³³ Michael Hill, “Two Flag over Dixie,” *League of the South*, July 13, 2015 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/two-flags-over-dixie/>> October 28, 2021

³³⁴ Michael Hill, “Two Southern Banners,” *League of the South*, December 27, 2014 <<https://leagueofthesouth.com/two-southern-banners489/>> October 28, 2021

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore the ways in which the discourse of Southern white nationalists embraces and reproduces the myth of the Lost Cause. In order to do this within the limit of a Master's thesis, the analysis was narrowed down to the organization of the League of the South, which was selected as a case study on the basis of the League's acceptance of the Lost Cause, neo-secessionist intentions, and high profile in the public sphere. While the conclusions drawn from the textual material taken and analyzed from the League's website cannot speak for all white Southern nationalists, I hope this thesis has contributed to the dialogue regarding white Southern nationalist existence, activity, and self-conception within the socio-historical framework of the American South.

The League of the South is one of many white nationalist organizations in the South, but their discourse is unique in the sense that it distinctly manifests Lost Cause narratives adapted to contemporary circumstances, and combines them with the League's white separatist aims. Despite its refusal of the label "neo-Confederates," the League's fixation on the defense of Confederate heritage and its own legitimization through alignment with the political and cultural legacy of the American Revolution and Confederate States of America, shows that their present and future focus on secession of the South is deeply embedded in Southern history, or rather its post-Civil War reinterpretation through the collective memory that is positive towards the Confederate cause and remains present in the American society.

This historical anchorage of the League is exhibited in their discourse by their adherence to a group identity on the basis of a self-constructed "white Southern ethnicity" of Anglo-Celtic roots, which alienates the organization from the American mainstream through their self-asserted ethnic and historical otherness, and serves as a justification for the group's

existence and resistance against perceived external threats. This resistance may involve violence and the League members are even instructed to prepare for a war (or even that they already are in one), but the ultimate goal is white separatism and a second secession of the South.

The League's acceptance of the Lost Cause in their discourse serves to give their secessionist intentions an aura of historical credibility, especially given that they do not derive their identity from the myth's collective memory that slavery in the South was right or would soon disappear, but that it was right to secede to protect itself, that its cause was glorious and its leaders were heroes. The League has formed in opposition to the United States as a reconstruction of the original Confederacy. Its rhetoric reflects the Lost Cause narrative of white Southerners as a distinct nation under attack, and displays deep reverence for Confederate symbols and figures as well as hostility displayed towards what the League perceives as illegitimate federal government. Throughout its nearly thirty-year-long existence, the organization has also adopted the white supremacist ideals of the Old South.

As a white nationalist organization, the League of the South exhibits traits in their discourse that are typical of white power movements, namely concern for the survival and well-being of the white race, conviction of the natural superiority of white culture, and the employment of specific strategies to portray themselves as a legitimate organization within the framework of a society hostile to their existence. The League's academic origins materialize in their use of language: the organization's racist and aggressive ideology hides behind the facade of socially acceptable constructs of identity politics and self-defense, and the reinterpretation of key issues through the lens of victimization seeks to establish the League as the champion of white Southern rights. Ultimately, the League envisions itself as a

protector of the white race, and hopes that other white nationalist organizations will follow its example in the reinstallation of white hegemony in Europe and North America.

In the introduction, the South has been identified as a region suffering from distinctly un-American experiences of scarring defeat and crippling poverty. Via their self-establishment as heirs of the American tradition of small government, Christian morality, and rebellion, the League conversely perceives white Southerners of Anglo-Celtic descent as the most American ethnicity, and the only one that is true to the original intentions of the Founding Fathers. This self-conception as a distinct and naturally superior ethnic nation is outlined by a shared identity symbolized by their use of iconography. The League's strong emotional attachment to the Confederate battle flag underlines its importance to white Southern nationalists as an emblem of Southern heritage and a symbol of resistance against the federal government. The creation of their original flag, the Black Cross, as well as its use on the League's uniforms, evidences an uncompromising group identity formed to demonstrate that the South shall rise again.

Today, about one half of white Southerners descends from the Confederates,³³⁵ and the myth of the Lost Cause continues to influence the identity of many, to the extent of organizations like the League of the South forming to protect Confederate heritage and the self-identified white Southern ethnicity. The revisionist collective memory of the Lost Cause still replaces the actual history in the minds of many, and plays a vital role in white Southern nationalism. It is however another false narrative to claim that the myth does influence the rest of the United States as well, or that white nationalism is exclusive to the South. As Kevin Thornton writes,

To read the Confederacy solely in terms of slavery is to create a counter-myth to the Lost Cause [...] far too easy to leap to the

³³⁵ Horwitz, 26.

additional false conclusion that racism is a southern problem rather than an American one.³³⁶

Despite its egalitarianist proclamations, the whole United States rests on the pillars of racism. It is too simplistic to equate the South with white supremacy and the North with abolitionism, and too alibistic to claim that the North did not profit from slavery. A different social order existed in the North, where African Americans were free but still unequal, and racial stereotypes provided fuel for discrimination both institutional and personal. Southern cotton fed the Northern factories and Southern wealth flowed into Northern banks. Though slavery was a regionally “peculiar institution,” the economy of the whole America benefited from the practice.³³⁷ Since the war, the North has also generated its fair share of racism and xenophobia; in 2020, the Southern Poverty Law Center tracked 838 hate groups across the United States, with Ku Klux Klan chapters appearing as far north as Pennsylvania, and some form of white nationalism appearing in nearly every state.³³⁸

While this thesis has focused on a case study of white Southern nationalism and examined its connections with the ideology of the Lost Cause, it also recognizes the importance of analyzing white power movements in the rest of the United States. It is vital to acknowledge that white nationalism or racism are not a regional issue of the South, but instead a pervasive part of the global socio-political culture. The United States must deal with these issues once and for all. The rest of the world should follow suit.

³³⁶ Thornton, 241.

³³⁷ Seth Rockman, “Liberty Is Land and Slaves: The Great Contradiction,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Market Revolution (May, 2005): 9. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25161940>> February 19, 2018. After the Confederate states seceded, Maryland, Missouri, Kentucky, and Delaware, all four slave states, remained in the Union; protection of black rights was not a primary directive of the North.

³³⁸ “Hate Map,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*. 2020 <<https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>> November 1, 2021.

Summary

The myth of the Lost Cause emerged after the Civil War in the former Confederate states as a defense mechanism for white Southerners who could not confront the loss of the antebellum way of life and racial hierarchy. Despite the fact that the social and economic order of the antebellum South rested on the pillars of slavery and white supremacy, and the Confederacy seceded to protect exactly these institutions from abolitionists and racial equality, the revisionist myth declared the war to have been fought over the issues of freedom and states' rights.

The narrative legitimized the Confederate defeat in a way that upheld the former nation as in the right, protected the Southern pride in their Confederate heritage and antebellum racial order, portrayed the Union as a horde of Northern aggressors justified white supremacy as the correct social order in the South. This line of thought was violently propagated by white supremacist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan. Through pro-Confederate organizations established after the war, which funded monuments to Confederate generals and soldiers, adopted the Confederate battle flag as an emblem of white Southern heritage, and dictated the pro-Confederate style of public education, the myth survived as an emotionally charged collective memory of the South to the 21st century, and contributed to the formation of white Southern nationalism and their perspective of Southern history and cultural legacy.

The League of the South, a white nationalist organization advocating for a new secession of the South, embraces the collective memory of the Lost Cause as a foundation of their existence and white separatist policies. Since its foundation in 1994, it has established itself as a protector of their “white Southern ethnicity” in what they perceive as the

historically white Christian South, and a champion of global white supremacy. On the basis of the narrative of the Lost Cause, the League perceives white Southerners as the Anglo-Celtic descendants of the Founding Fathers and Confederate leaders, whose ethnic and cultural heritage is threatened with deliberate annihilation by the anti-Southern politics of the federal government, the so-called “American Empire” which seeks to destroy Southern symbols, intervene in the education of Southern children, and corrupt the traditional Christian values of the antebellum South.

To protect their “Southern nation,” the League advocates for the second secession of the Southern states on the basis of the right to self-determination of all ethnicities, which should serve as an inspiration to other white nationalists across the world to reinstate white hegemony on the basis of blood and soil. These discourses are inspired by previous white supremacist rhetoric espoused by Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist organizations. The League frequently uses language that victimizes white Southerners, and the rhetoric of federal tyranny evokes the collective memory of Northern invasion. Through their self-identification as an ethnic minority endangered by hostile external influences forced to resistance, the League is able to claim legitimacy for their cause as they frame their activities in socially acceptable constructs.

Simultaneously, the League of the South exhibits white supremacist discourse in both written text and (audio)visual media, while masking their racist views as reactionary self-defense from federal agenda. The League's doctrine of natural superiority of the white Southerners and their historical land claims to the Southern lands on the basis of settlers and American revolutionaries simultaneously privilege the self-styled white Southern ethnicity, justify their claim to the South in history, and presents itself as a group of “defenders of the blood,” the reactionary opponents to the federal government which they perceive as

hateful to their Southern white ethnicity. In this way, the League evokes the heritage of the Lost Cause by identification with white supremacy and resistance to federal (British, Northern) aggression, thus lending their organization credibility on the basis of what they perceive as their historical, cultural, and ethnic heritage. To protect this American legacy from a perceived threat by the United States that they no longer consider their legitimate government, the League instructs its members to weaponize and prepare for a violent conflict with their federal enemy that will once again not let them secede peacefully, and even perceives the white Southerners as already at war with multiculturalism.

The League's use of iconography shows how important flag symbolism is to group identity and collective memory. The Southern Cross is possibly the most flagrant emblem of Confederate heritage, and its continuing removal from the public sphere for its long-term association with slavery and racism serves as an example of white Southern victimization and perceived historical revisionism of what is the collective memory of the Lost Cause. To the League of the South, the Confederate battle flag symbolizes not only the narrative of the Lost Cause and the glorified Confederacy, but also represents white hegemony and Christian traditionalism in the South, which the League perceives positively. For both associations, the League promotes and protects the battle flag as a vital part of Confederate legacy and an ideal for the organization to look up to in its secessionist goals. The League's frequent usage of the battle flag as a symbol of their collective memory of the South and an instrument of rebellion against the federal government serves as the means to revive the South as the White Man's Land, and unites the organization's present-day focus with its historical origins.

Using the Southern Cross as an antithesis to the federal flag, i.e., a symbol of a glorified collective memory against a representation of a federal government perceived as a hostile entity to the South, the League flies the battle flag as an emblem of resistance. The

conflict demonstrates a paradox, as the League's criticism of American "idolatry" of Stars and Stripes is matched by the reverence of the organization towards the Confederate battle flag. This reverence for resistance has recently been channeled into the so-called Black Cross of the League of the South, a flag designed to represent the organization and differentiate it from other white nationalist organizations. Embodying the collective identity of the League as well as its goals, the Black Cross's dominant function is the signalization of the organization's ideal future; combined with the Southern Cross, the flags symbolize the League's identification with white Southern heritage of the Lost Cause, resistance against the perceived external hostility from the federal government, and together merge into the fuel for the League's neo-secessionist plans for the restoration of white hegemony in the South. Flying both flags then represents the unity of the League and the Lost Cause.

As a representative of the Southern theater of white nationalism, the League of the South embraces and manifests the narrative of the Lost Cause. It does so through opposition to the federal government grounded in the victimized discourse of a white Southern nation, reverence for the collective Southern memory of the Confederate glory, use of symbolic unity and resistance through iconography, and discourse of the supremacy of white Southern ethnicity. The narrative of the Lost Cause is therefore a pillar of the League of the South's existence, as well as the source of its activities.

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